



Public Record Office  
of Northern Ireland

# **INTRODUCTION**

# **FOSTER MASSEREENE PAPERS**

November 2007

# Foster/Massereene Papers (D207, D562, D1739 and D4084)

## Table of Content

Summary .....	4
Family history.....	5
Sir Hugh Clotworthy (d.1630).....	6
A needy and nervous Lord Deputy .....	7
'Captain of Lough Neagh'.....	8
Antrim Castle .....	9
Sir John Clotworthy, 1st Viscount Massereene (c.1600-1665) .....	11
Clotworthy's territorial gains at the expense of Lord Antrim .....	12
Other losses and gains at the Restoration.....	13
The parliamentary borough of Antrim.....	14
Sir John Skeffington, 5th Bt, 2nd Viscount Massereene (d.1695).....	15
Lord Massereene's varied financial and landed interests .....	16
Public offices.....	17
The Williamite War.....	18
The Antrim Castle gardens .....	19
Evidence from the Ordnance Survey memoir .....	20
The 3rd and 4th Viscounts Massereene (1695-1739).....	21
Clotworthy Skeffington, 5th Viscount and 1st Earl of Massereene (1739-1757) ....	22
Politics in Co. Antrim and Antrim borough, c.1750-1800.....	23
Clotworthy Skeffington, 2nd Earl of Massereene (1757-1805).....	24
Imprisonment for debt.....	25
Re-incarceration .....	26
The battle of Antrim .....	27
Undue influence.....	28
The 3rd Earl of Massereene (1805-1811).....	29
The 4th Earl of Massereene (1811-1816).....	31
The Foster family, c.1660-1779 .....	32
A borough-owning family .....	33
Law and politics .....	34

The build-up of the Foster estate .....	35
Anthony Foster (1705-1779), the "great improver" .....	36
John (Speaker) Foster (1740-1828).....	37
A period of rapid political change .....	38
Foster and the Union .....	39
Politics and economics .....	40
'Prosperity by Act of Parliament' .....	41
Preoccupations and priorities.....	42
Foster's wife and children .....	43
Thomas Henry Foster, 2nd Viscount Ferrard (1772-1843) .....	44
Two estates in tandem.....	45
John Skeffington, 10th Viscount Massereene and 3rd Viscount Ferrard (1812-1863) .....	46
Clotworthy John Skeffington, 11th Viscount Massereene and 4th Viscount Ferrard (1842-1905) .....	48
An unflattering comparison with Lord Clanricarde .....	50
Algernon William John Skeffington, 12th Viscount Massereene and 5th Viscount Ferrard (1873-1956) .....	51
The Antrim Castle fire .....	52
The period 1922-1956.....	53
The archive .....	54
D1739 (Clotworthy House papers) .....	55
D207 .....	55
D562 .....	56
D2681 .....	56
D4084 (Chilham papers) .....	57
T2519/4.....	57
MIC618.....	57
D3711 (Emerson papers) .....	57
MIC251 (Cooper papers).....	57
The Massereene Papers.....	59
Estate papers .....	59
Family correspondence, 1690-1760 .....	59
Family correspondence, 1760-1830.....	59
General .....	60
The Foster Papers .....	61
Papers on estate and private finances .....	61

Correspondence about estates and private finances .....	61
Family correspondence .....	61
Papers of Archbishop Theophilus Bolton of Cashel .....	61
Papers relating to the city of Dublin.....	62
Papers on the Dublin Society, the Farming Society of Ireland and other societies and schemes for agricultural improvement.....	62
Linen .....	62
Religion .....	63
Papers of John Foster as Speaker of the Irish House of Commons .....	64
Other bibliographical material .....	65
Papers of John Foster on Irish trade and revenue, 1777-1800.....	66
Papers of John Foster as Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer at Westminster, 1804-06 and 1807-11 .....	67
Later correspondence of John Foster on matters concerned with politics, trade and finance, 1812-1828 .....	69
Papers on Co. Louth affairs .....	70
Miscellaneous correspondence of Thomas Henry Foster, 2nd Viscount Ferrard...	71
General.....	72

## Summary



*John Foster*

The Foster/Massereene papers comprise over 26,000 documents and volumes, 1590-1935, deriving from the Foster family of Collon, Co. Louth, Viscounts Ferrard, and the Clotworthy and Skeffington families, Viscounts Massereene, of Antrim Castle, Co. Antrim, and relating to their estates, mainly in Cos Antrim and Louth, and to the lives and political careers of individual family members, most notably John Foster (1740-1828), last Speaker of the Irish House of Commons.

The two families came together through a marriage of 1810 between the Foster heir and the Massereene heiress. Their estates and titles merged in the person of the 10th Viscount Massereene and 3rd Viscount Ferrard in 1843. 'Massereene' is the barony (or, rather, Upper and Lower Massereene are the two half baronies) in Co. Antrim where Antrim Castle and the bulk of the Massereene estate lay; and 'Ferrard' is the barony in Co. Louth where Collon and the bulk of the Foster estate were situated.



## Family history

This is the first attempt at a reasonably concise account of the Foster/Massereene family. Up to now, the single best source for Massereene family history, though antiquarian and uncritical, is Charles Henry O'Neill, *Antrim Castle: Seat of the Rt Hon. Lord Viscount Massereene and Ferrard, Baron of Lough Neagh* (Dublin, 1860). Another useful source is the background research which Dr Tim Campbell and Mr Ian Rice of Ballinderry de Pauillac Historical Consultants have carried out on behalf of Antrim Borough Council and in connection with the Council's application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to restore the Antrim Castle gardens. Dr A.P.W. Malcomson, the compiler of the present account, has written two essays on the Massereenes in the second half of the 18th century, and articles and a book on the Fosters to 1828. These and other sources are cited in the text as they occur. The present Viscount Massereene and Ferrard has commented on the text, as well as helping with the illustrations.



## **Sir Hugh Clotworthy (d.1630)**

Hugh Clotworthy came to Ireland in 1573 as a member of the 1st Earl of Essex's expedition to Ulster. He must later have distinguished himself in the Nine Years' War, because (in a patent quoted in the 1789 edition of Lodge's *Peerage of Ireland*) he is described as 'a man of extraordinary merit in those wars'.

The Clotworthys came originally from Somerset, but in the 16th century Hugh Clotworthy's branch moved to Devonshire on marrying an heiress of that county. In 1603, Capt. Hugh Clotworthy, as he then was, was part of the garrison of Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim, serving under its Governor, a fellow-Devonian, Sir Arthur Chichester. Chichester had arrived in Ireland more recently, only in 1599, and Clotworthy probably served under him in the latter stages of the Nine Years War. His fortunes were thereafter closely linked with those of Chichester, who in 1603 received a grant of a huge estate in and around Belfast and Carrickfergus, as well as the governorship of the latter castle. In 1603 Chichester was also constituted Admiral of Lough Sidney or Lough Neagh, and was granted its fishing rights and the fishing rights of the River Bann as far as the salmon leap south of Coleraine, Co. Londonderry. In 1605, he was appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1605 and remained in that office until 1616. Having been first a lieutenant, Clotworthy became also a tenant, of Chichester. In 1606 he obtained from Chichester a lease of '... "Massarine", which [in the words of Campbell and Rice] consisted partly of confiscated church lands and partly of the lands of the O'Neills of Killultagh. By 1606 he had built a moated bawn enclosing five acres, flanked with towers which included an earlier Norman motte. In accordance with his contract [with Chichester] ..., Clotworthy planted English and Scottish settlers (Presbyterians like himself) on his lands. He was knighted at about this time. ...'



## A needy and nervous Lord Deputy

As Professor Roebuck explains in 'The Making of an Ulster Great Estate: the Chichesters, Barons of Belfast and Viscounts of Carrickfergus, 1599-1648' in the Proceedings of the *Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 79, C, no. i (1979), the first non-native grantee of the future Massereene estate in Co. Antrim had been, not Chichester, but James Hamilton, '... formerly a Scottish agent in Ireland', favourite of James I and later 1st Viscount Clandeboye. The first grant of fairs and markets at Antrim was dated 1605 and was to Hamilton. In the period 1605-c.1608, in a series of transactions which are obscure and were probably underhand, Chichester obtained from Hamilton property which '... more than doubled the size of his holdings in the county, extending them both northwards along the coast and, more significantly, into the interior beyond the valley of the Six Mile Water and as far as the town of Antrim ..., [and comprising] the tough or territory of Moylinny, which included Antrim town, the territory of Ballylinny, which included Dunadry and Templepatrick ...', and much else besides.

Chichester was perennially short of ready money, of which he had a desperate need in order to support himself in the expensive Lord Deputyship from 1605 onwards. He also may well have been uneasy about his own title to the lands acquired from Hamilton and eager to implicate others in this acquisition. For whatever reason, he adopted a policy of '... demising sizeable properties on fee farm grants, i.e. for a fine and an annual rent, but for an indefinite term. ... [On this basis, he made the lease of 1606 to Clotworthy which comprehended] ... the whole of the territory of Massereene ...; the fine is unrecorded, but the rent was a mere £55 10s 10d a year (PRONI, D389/4). ... In November 1621, Clotworthy, having previously leased sixteen townlands in the manor of Moylinny, among which were the castle and townland of Antrim, obtained them on fee farm from Chichester for a fine of £275 and a subsequent annual rent of £12 ...' (PRONI, D811/1).



## **'Captain of Lough Neagh'**

In 1656, Clotworthy's son (according to Lodge) was due to receive from Cromwell a 99-year lease of the same fishing rights in Lough Neagh and the Bann which Chichester had enjoyed; so possibly this was a renewal or confirmation of an earlier lease from Chichester himself to Clotworthy. A framed patent in the possession of the present Viscount Massereene and Ferrard appoints Clotworthy 'Captain of Lough Neagh and Commander of the Boats and Barques built thereupon' in 1618, with a daily allowance for charges incurred in this capacity; and this was a confirmation of an earlier grant of 1609 (presumably under Chichester as Admiral of Lough Neagh).

Clotworthy married in 1607 Mary, daughter of another planter from Devonshire, Roger Langford of nearby Muckamore, to whom the lands of the dissolved abbey or priory of Muckamore were granted in 1621. Langford had no son, so Muckamore later merged with the main Massereene estate (though not without litigation). Clotworthy was sheriff of Co. Antrim in 1622 and died in 1630.



## Antrim Castle

In a report on the 'Excavations at Antrim Castle Gardens, 1991 and 1994' for Antrim Borough Council, Malachy G. Conway and Terence Reeves-Smyth write: the castle '... was burnt in 1922, and its impressive shell, being deemed unsafe, was demolished by the Antrim and Ballymena Development Commission in April 1970. The building, probably the largest house in 17th-century Ulster, was principally erected in stages between 1610 and 1662 by ... Clotworthy and his son, the 1st Viscount Massereene. [The first stage of the building was completed in 1613. The castle] ... comprised a rectangular, three-storey block with projecting corner towers, a small central courtyard, an impressive enfilade of apartments flanking its long southern side, and a remarkable cutstone, mannerist frontispiece surrounding and surmounting the main doorcase on the eastern front ... .

During the 17th century, the castle and adjacent "mount" were enclosed within a substantial bawn of over five acres' extent, delimited on the west, north and east sides by a "broad and deep moat communicating with the river, whence it was kept constantly filled" ... . This enclosure was protected by massive artillery bastions on both the east and western sides. The present 18th-century terraced gardens were formed out of the bastions commanding the town. Much of the bawn moat and walls seem not to be present on John Maclanaghan's 1720-1722 demesne map (D611) and were probably removed between 1695 and 1714 by the 3rd Viscount Massereene, to link the garden layout with the house. It is likely, however, that work on these gardens was actually begun sometime between 1665 and 1687 by Sir John Skeffington, 2nd Viscount Massereene ... .

Between 1811 and 1813 the castle was "restored" and enlarged by ... Chichester Skeffington, 4th and last Earl of Massereene. He replaced the building's array of 17th-century pointed gables with a castellated parapet surmounting a cavetto frieze and cornice, while slender angle turrets and shallow pyramidal roofs were applied to the corner towers, and label mouldings added to the windows. ... ' He filled in the courtyard to the rear of the house and extended it on this side, the west. His architects may have been Richard and William Vitruvius Morrison.

Campbell and Rice resume: '... in 1818, the Barbican Gate Lodge at Antrim Castle was built [probably by John Bowden of Dublin, who had previously worked for the Foster family in Co. Louth]. This consisted of a massive gateway, flanked on either side with octagonal towers, and was manned on state occasions by warders armed with battleaxes. ...' Following this, the famous stone statue of an Irish wolfhound, which had been taken down from the top of a tower during the 1811-1813 remodelling, was erected on the bastion wall to the right of the new gateway. According to family legend, a wolfhound had saved the life of the first Lady Clotworthy and later the lives of the entire garrison of the castle, in the early 17th century, and the statue mysteriously appeared when the original was killed. In recent years the statue has again been moved, to the front of the Antrim Forum sports complex in the demesne.

Further alterations to the castle were carried out in 1887, to the designs of the Belfast architect, William J. Fennell. These may have included the tall, octagonal turret which terminated the 180-foot long river front, but this turret may well be earlier. It is the only part of the building which still stands on the site today. The 'cutstone, mannerist frontispiece' survived the fire in 1922 and the demolition in 1970, but is stored off-site by the Environment and Heritage Service (NI).



## **Sir John Clotworthy, 1st Viscount Massereene (c.1600-1665)**

Sir John Clotworthy, Sir Hugh's elder son, succeeded to his father's estates. He was MP for Co. Antrim in the 1634 parliament. In 1638 the office of 'Captain of Lough Neagh' with its concomitant allowance was confirmed to him, and in the same year he made an unsuccessful bid for a lease of the estates of all the London companies in Co. Londonderry. In 1641 it was a servant of Clotworthy, on whose testimony Clotworthy acted, who revealed and thus foiled a plan to seize Dublin Castle in the King's name.

In *Civil War and Restoration in the three Kingdoms: the Career of Randal MacDonnell, Marquess of Antrim, 1609-1683* (Cambridge, 1993), Jane H. Ohlmeyer writes of Clotworthy: he was '... related by marriage to the parliamentary leader, John Pym, was determined to protect the Presbyterian settlement in Ulster, and took an important part in bringing [Lord Deputy] Strafford and later [Archbishop] Laud to trial. [At the start of the 1641 Rebellion he raised a regiment to secure Antrim against assault, and his forces took Mountjoy Fort, Co. Tyrone, from the rebels in July 1642. In that year he was prominent in] ... cleansing Co. Antrim of "the rebels ...". Clotworthy and his men chased ... 700 Highlanders into the Glynns, killing a number and capturing 3,000 head of cattle. They then took a fort built by the MacNaughtens and executed 100 of the "rebels" hiding in it. ... An enquiry, in which Alexander MacNaughten laid the blame on Clotworthy, was made into this massacre at the Restoration. ... [Antrim Castle was captured by the Parliamentarians in 1648.

Clotworthy] ... remained active at Westminster until he was imprisoned in England between December 1648 and 1651 on charges of stirring up war between the parliament and the army and of embezzling supplies for the parliamentary army in Ireland. Eventually, like so many others, he also made a bargain with the Cromwellians and spent much of the 1650s on his Ulster estates. ...



## **Clotworthy's territorial gains at the expense of Lord Antrim**

[He was one of the Cromwellian 'Adventurers', and] in June 1653 the barony of Dunluce [Co. Antrim] was ... set aside for sixteen [Adventurers, including Clotworthy] ..., largely Londoners, who had advanced a total of £8,656 in return for 42,611 Irish acres of land. In the months following, ... the speculators either sold or exchanged their adventures. ... Clotworthy ..., who had originally invested £2,254 and received 11,231 acres in the baronies of Massereene and Dunluce, doubled his territorial empire in Co. Antrim by buying up lots in the barony of Dunluce to the value of £3,187. [In August 1654, Cromwell appointed him one of the committee established to determine differences among the Adventurers.]

At the Restoration he played a prominent role in representing the Protestant interest in Ireland to the King, and [in spite of his opposition to the re-establishment of episcopacy in Ireland] in November 1660 was created Viscount Massereene [with remainder to his son-in-law and, most unusually, to the latter's "heirs general"].

... [At the end of 1662, the Marquess of Antrim, whose estate in the baronies of Dunluce and Massereene] ... had been carved up, and well over 100,000 acres of it parcelled out to mercenary entrepreneurs, ... applied for a hearing before the Court of Claims. This ... panicked those who had acquired Antrim's lands. Led by [the new] Lord Massereene ..., they called for a further investigation into Antrim's behaviour during the 1640s in the hope that new evidence would be found which would disqualify him from being declared an "innocent papist" by the Commissioners and thereby recovering his former lands from them. In February 1663, to appease the petitioners, Charles II referred their complaints to an English ad hoc committee ... [who] ruled in Antrim's favour and urged him to apply for a trial before the Court of Claims. ... In a letter dated 10 July 1663, Charles II declared the Marquess "innocent of any malice or rebellious purpose towards the crown" and ordered ... [the Lord Lieutenant] to assist him to recover his estates by making known the King's wishes to the Commissioners of the Court of Claims. ...'



## **Other losses and gains at the Restoration**

Lord Massereene was also unsuccessful in at least one other hearing before the Court of Claims. According to Karl S. Bottingheimer, 'The Restoration Land Settlement in Ireland: a structural View' (*Irish Historical Studies*, March 1972), Massereene, 'who ... had been one of the few Ancient Protestants among the Adventurers, was so inflamed by the judgement of innocency on Sir Henry O'Neill, some of whose estates he held, that he rashly threatened in the House of Lords to defend what was his by the sword. ...' It was rumoured that he was implicated in Colonel Blood's rebellion, so great was his disenchantment at the Restoration land settlement.

Nevertheless, it was not without its compensations for him. Lodge records that the Cromwellian 99-year lease of the fishing rights in Lough Neagh and part of the Bann (which was in itself compensation to him for the cessation of his allowance as Captain of Lough Neagh) was confirmed to him immediately after the Restoration. In lieu of lands in the barony of Dunluce belonging to Lord Antrim and subject to a rentcharge to 'Daniel O'Neill of the King's Bedchamber', he was in December 1660 granted an estate in Co. Kildare.

He was appointed Custos Rotulorum of Co. Londonderry in 1663 and died on 25 September 1665.

Even the admiring C.H. O'Neill describes him as the 'stormy petrel of the Presbytery'. The *D.N.B.* records that he was accused of having said '... that the conversion of the papists in Ireland was only to be effected by the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other'. His fanaticism was seen at its most unattractive at the time of the execution of Archbishop Laud, when he taunted and abused Laud on the scaffold.



## The parliamentary borough of Antrim

As well as obtaining for his family a peerage with remainders so special that, whether by accident or design, it would survive all foreseeable possibilities of extinction, Lord Massereene also ensuring the abiding political importance of his descendants by obtaining in the year of his death a charter making Antrim a parliamentary borough.

In 'Election Politics in the Borough of Antrim, 1750-1800', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. xvii (1970), A.P.W. Malcomson writes: '... By the terms of this charter, the borough existed simply to return two members to parliament, and this it continued to do till it was disfranchised by the Act of the Union in 1800. It had no corporation nor any corporate function. Its only borough official was the seneschal of the manor of Moylinny, who was appointed by the lord of that manor and acted as returning officer at borough of Antrim elections. The borough comprised, roughly speaking, the town and sixteen surrounding townlands of Antrim, known popularly as "Antrim and the sixteen towns". The lord of its soil was Lord Massereene, who, by a curious freak, was not lord of the manor of Moylinny. This lordship still belonged to Lord Deputy Chichester's descendants, the Earls of Donegall, to whom Lord Massereene also paid a chief rent for the Antrim estate. But because the interests of the two families had always been closely intertwined and had been drawn still closer together by marriage alliance in 1713, Lord Massereene had no difficulty in getting his nominee appointed seneschal of the manor, and the seneschal was usually the receiver of the rents on his Antrim estate.'

Antrim was a "potwalloping" borough, which meant that the franchise was vested in the inhabitants. It was limited by the election act of 1727 to the protestant inhabitants only, and further limited by the election act of 1795 to £5 householders, whether protestant or catholic. This was a drastic limitation, since up to then there had been no property qualification in the potwalloper type of franchise. The result in Antrim was an enormous fall in the number of voters. The 2nd Earl of Massereene estimated that the electorate prior to 1795 consisted of between 200 and 300 people, and of somewhere around 30 after that date. In 1801 there were 36 registered electors.

Such was the constitution of Antrim borough. Although on the face of it simple enough, it was yet sufficiently complex to provide no less than five different parties with a claim to compensation for its disenfranchisement in 1800. This followed a series of election contests and take-over bids during the last third of the 18th century. In fighting these, the descendants of the 1st Viscount Massereene were favoured by the fact that Antrim was a potwalloping borough, where the only natural and permanent interest lay with the owner of the soil. In the whole of Ireland there were only twelve potwalloping boroughs and six manor boroughs (which in most respects exhibited the same characteristics), and it was lucky for the Massereene family, or well-judged on the part of their ancestor, that the 1665 charter made Antrim one of them. ...'



## **Sir John Skeffington, 5th Bt, 2nd Viscount Massereene (d.1695)**

The Skeffingtons are an ancient family of Saxon origin. In the period 1530-1535, one of Sir John Skeffington's ancestors, Sir William Skeffington, had been Lord Deputy of Ireland (the last Roman Catholic to hold the office either of Lord Deputy or Lord Lieutenant, with the exception of the Duke of Tyrconnel in 1687-1689 and Lord Fitzalan in 1921-1922).

The *D.N.B.* contains the following information about Sir John Skeffington: Skeffington '... was the eldest son of Sir Richard Skeffington, 4th Bt, of Fisherwick, near Lichfield. ... In 1647 he succeeded his father as

5th baronet. In or before 1660 [actually, in 1654] he married Mary, only daughter and heiress of Sir John Clotworthy, 1st Viscount Massereene. He was elected MP for Co. Antrim in 1661. By the death of his father-in-law in 1665, Skeffington became Viscount Massereene. He succeeded to a great Irish estate in his wife's right, and the lately created honour devolved upon him by special remainder.



*George III silver-gilt freedom box engraved with the Foster arms*



## **Lord Massereene's varied financial and landed interests**

By the Act of Explanation (1665) he was made a commissioner to receive and administer funds contributed for the defence of their interests by officers serving after 5 June 1649. ...' In 1668, presumably in part-satisfaction of his unsettled claims against Lord Antrim's estate, he received what Campbell and Rice describe as: '... land grants in the baronies of Dunluce, Massereene, Kilconway, Toome and Antrim, [Co. Antrim], and also in Cos Cavan, Clare, Louth, Monaghan, Tipperary and Westmeath which, when added to his original Massereene estate, gave him an Irish acreage of about 45,000 acres. ...' Nevertheless, as late as 1679, Lord Massereene was petitioning and campaigning to be restored to his share (which he valued at £2,700 per annum) of Lord Antrim's estate.

The Co. Monaghan estate alone contained some 12,500 statute acres, a high proportion of them situated in the parishes of Aughnamullen and Clontibret in the barony of Cremorne. By 1701 the rental of this estate was £436 per annum. Gradually, it was leased away in perpetuity, particularly during the first half of the 18th century. The Co. Cavan estate was of similar extent. The Book of Survey and Distribution gives Lord Massereene a total of 8,518 Irish acres in Cavan, of which 6,503 were in the parishes of Killinkere, Lurgan, Castlerahan, Denn and Crosserlough, barony of Castlerahan, and 1,493 in the parishes of Denn, Ballintemple, etc, barony of Clanmahon, and formed a kind of crescent straddling those two baronies. In 1701, the Massereene estate was reckoned to contain 10,000 Irish acres, none of it let in perpetuity, at a rental of £387, which would rise by £160 in fifteen years' time, when leases fell in (D562/206, 834 and 217). 'Eight tates of land' were sold about this time; this was the Magheradown estate, barony of Castlerahan. From at least 1750 until after the union, Magheradown was owned by the Caldwell family of Castle Caldwell, Co. Fermanagh; its rental in 1819 was £1,259 (NA, QRO ledgers, vol. 127, f.12; PRONI, D1550/7). By 1713, the acreage of the remaining estate was 6,945 and by 1716, the rental was £663. In 1760, Lord Farnham's 'Massereene' estate had a rental of £964 (Farnham papers, NLI, MS 11491).

In addition to these lands owned in fee simple, Lord Massereene had fingers in other pies. His fisheries lease proved to be extremely valuable (it was producing £460 per annum to his successor in 1701), and the fact that his fish were seized and eaten at different times by both sides in the siege of Derry in 1689 gave him the opportunity to lodge with the government a no doubt highly inflated claim for compensation. In 1673, he obtained a 60-year lease of the Vintners Company's estate in and around Bellaghy, Co. Londonderry, not very far from Antrim. In 1682, a debt of £1,000 owed him by Thomas Dawson of Castle Dawson, then called Dawson's Bridge, Co. Londonderry, tenant of the Drapers Company's estate in the same county, placed Lord Massereene in receipt of a substantial portion of the rents of that estate at least up to 1699. Another welcome development is recorded in the D.N.B. account: '... In 1677 he was released from the quit rents imposed by the Acts of Settlement and Explanation upon his estate, and this seems to have been done with the help of his friend, the Lord-Lieutenant, [Arthur Capel, 1st Earl of] Essex ... .



## **Public offices**

In 1666 he became Custos Rotulorum of Co. Londonderry, and a Commissioner of Revenue in 1673. ... In 1680 ... he was made Captain of Lough Neagh. This grant, an enlargement of [the] one formerly enjoyed by his father-in-law, was in consideration of his "great charges to fortify the town and castle of Antrim, making them much more considerable for the security of those parts". [He was appointed Governor of Co. Antrim in or before 1683, and Governor of Co. Londonderry and the town of Coleraine] in 1685 and sworn of the Privy Council.



## **The Williamite War**

[Under James II], Massereene was ... reappointed to his governorships. ... He was a conspicuous defender of the protestant interest in Ulster, and particularly anxious to prevent Roman Catholics from enlisting in the army or militia ..., [even when] ... James II and Tyrconnel substituted an Irish army for a protestant militia. ... Recruiting was within his special province as Governor of Co. Londonderry. When the citizens of Londonderry determined to stand on their defence, Massereene helped them with a large sum of money, ... [and] was one of those to whom the Enniskilleners specially appealed for help ...

It was at Antrim Castle that the protestants of the county met under Massereene's presidency [to form the "Antrim Association" to resist the Jacobites], and his only surviving son, Clotworthy, was chosen to command them in the field. Massereene himself withdrew to England soon afterwards. In Tyrconnel's proclamation of 7 March 1689, both father and son were among the ten persons excepted by name from mercy as "principal actors in the rebellion". Massereene was in London in November 1689, being one of the Irish committee chosen to confer with William ... . Soon after the "break of Dromore" on 14 March 1689, Antrim Castle was sacked, about £4,000 in money and plate falling into Jacobite hands. He and his son were both included in the great Irish Act of Attainder in May 1689, his estate being valued at £4,340 a year ...

Massereene returned to Ireland after the battle of the Boyne, sat in the parliament which met on 5 October 1692, and was active in the business of the House of Lords. [He was reappointed Custos Rotulorum of Co. Londonderry in 1693]. He died on 21 June 1695, and was buried at Antrim. His only surviving son, Clotworthy, succeeded him as 3rd Viscount ...'.



## The Antrim Castle gardens

An important legacy of the 2nd Viscount Massereene (and also very probably the 3rd) is the Antrim Castle gardens. The 2nd Viscount is known to have acquired seed from England and planted evergreen trees. The gardens were traditionally supposed to have been laid out by Le N<sup>o</sup>tre, designer of the gardens at Vaux le Vicomte and Versailles. But there is no evidence to support this improbable attribution. Indeed, there is virtually no documentation of the gardens in the archive, though the present Viscount Massereene and Ferrard has in his possession a framed garden and demesne map of 1844 which has been photographed by Antrim Borough Council. The Council now owns the gardens, and since 1990 has been carrying out an extensive restoration programme on them.

The Council's consultants in this work, Belinda Jupp and Thomas McErlean, have written a so far unpublished historic landscape gazetteer of the site and have greatly contributed to the Antrim Castle file in the Historic Gardens Archive maintained as part of the NI Monuments and Buildings Record. Mrs Jupp and Mr McErlean have also provided the following note on the gardens:

'Antrim Castle gardens are the finest example of late 17th- to early 18th-century formal gardens in Ireland and are amongst the most intact in Britain. While many larger and grander gardens existed in the same style, essential elements were frequently swept away or were allowed to fall into decay during the time of radical changes in garden fashion that took place from the mid-18th century. Many contemporary sites had similar features that can now only be appreciated as garden archaeology. In contrast, practically all the lay-out at Antrim, including much of the character of the original planting can still be enjoyed.

Within the demesne the main ornamental area to the north of the castle site contains a wilderness of woodland, ponds, canals and straight avenues that lead towards controlled vistas. The lay-out was designed on strong geometric lines, with three approximately parallel long axis formed by two avenues and a canal that run from north to south. These are intersected by eight narrow alleys, laid out in parallel groups. The avenue, alleys and canal are lined by clipped lime and hornbeam trees. Mrs Delany reported after a visit in 1758 that "The garden was acknowledged a fine one forty years ago ...", and she recalled seeing "... high hedges and long narrow walks." Other features include the Large Parterre (recently restored) and Little Parterre (now the family burial ground), from which a miniature crow's foot or *patte d'oie* of paths radiates. Both the canal and the Little Parterre were depicted in drawings by Sir John Crampton in the 1820s. The Anglo-Norman motte forms the most dominant feature within the garden. With the addition of a yew-edged spiral path, it was put to use as a garden mount, from which views of the flat site of the garden could be appreciated.'



## **Evidence from the Ordnance Survey memoir**

The first Ordnance Survey map of 1833 gives a clear indication of the layout. The memoir by James Boyle of 1835, which accompanies the map, is very detailed and informative and provides an excellent reference as to the appearance of the site at that time, part of which is quoted here:

"The grounds on this side of the river, known as 'The Wilderness', are in this parish [Antrim] and including the gardens extend over about 37 acres. Those on the opposite side of the river are in the Grange of Muckamore and stretching along the shore of the lake for about two miles, extend over about 1,090 acres laid down in pasture as a deer park and sheep walks and beautifully ornamented with some old wood and numerous tastefully disposed clumps and belts of young planting.

The Wilderness is at once unique and curious in its arrangement, being a perfect specimen of the French style of gardening in the 17th century. And though almost flat and extending over no greater extent than 37 acres, it is so laid out as to seem more than double its real size. It consists of a grove thickly wooded with very tall and tapering elms, interspersed with a few other trees and shrubs, traversed by numerous perfectly straight alleys and walks, these again intersected by several curiously contrived vistas cut through the planting, bearing on some interesting object such as the round tower, the church spire, the chapel, etc, and at the termination of two of them are handsome bases [vases] supported by pedestals.

The grounds are also ornamented by some beautiful ponds; one of these is 220 yards long and 10 yards broad; a walk and a splendid lime hedge 18 feet high extends along each side of it. There are two other ponds which are circular, the largest of these is 186 yards in circumference. ..."

It should also be noted, in this horticultural connection, that the 2nd Viscount Massereene contests with the 1st Earl of Granard the distinction of having been the first to introduce the pineapple into Ireland.



## **The 3rd and 4th Viscounts Massereene (1695-1739)**

Clotworthy Skeffington, 3rd Viscount Massereene (1660-1714), was in his youth colonel of a regiment of foot and joint commander of the Williamite forces in Co. Antrim. He was MP for Co. Antrim, (1692-1693). He succeeded his father and took his seat in the House of Lords in 1695. He married in 1680 Rachel, daughter of Sir Edward Hungerford of Farley, Somerset, and died at Antrim in 1714. It is possible that the formal part of the Antrim Castle gardens derive from him rather than from his father.

Their son and heir, Clotworthy Skeffington, 4th Viscount Massereene, was MP for Co. Antrim, 1703-1714, and married in 1713 Catherine, first daughter of Arthur Chichester, 3rd Earl of Donegall. Negotiations over this marriage give rise to a wealth of information about the income from the Massereene estates and the debts encumbering them at this time. For example, it shows that the Co. Antrim estate then contained 8,178 Irish acres at a rental of £2,390 per annum, between a third and a half of which came from Antrim and the 16 towns. The 4th Viscount Massereene died in 1739. In 1718, as has been seen, all of the Co. Cavan estate which had not been sold in 1701 was alienated, presumably to clear debt.



## **Clotworthy Skeffington, 5th Viscount and 1st Earl of Massereene (1739-1757)**

The 5th Viscount was born c.1715 and succeeded his father in 1739. He was created Earl of Massereene in 1756, one year before his death. He married twice, his first wife dying very young. His second wife, whom he married in 1741, was Anne, daughter and heiress of Henry Eyre of Row Tor, Derbyshire, and by her he had four sons (three of whom succeeded in turn to the earldom) and two daughters.

He was a spendthrift, and at his death in 1757 it was reported that 'his affairs were in no good condition'. In particular, he had been obliged to raise large sums of ready money by granting leases in perpetuity on parts of his Irish estates. In Co. Monaghan, for which the evidence survives, the effect was to reduce the 12,500 acres of 1668 to nine by 1883, and nearly all the damage was done in the first half of the 18th century. In 1755, Lord Massereene even sold the Fisherwick estate in Staffordshire. This was the estate which had been in the family for far longer than any other, and which had provided the territorial designation for the family's oldest title, the Skeffington baronetcy created in 1627. After one intermediate purchaser, Lord Massereene's cousin, the 5th Earl (later 1st Marquess) of Donegall, bought Fisherwick (for £30,000) in 1761 and proceeded to demolish and replace the Tudor mansion of the Skeffingtons in 1766.

In compensation for this loss of ancestral Skeffington property, Lady Massereene inherited the Row Tor estate on her father's death in the same year, 1766 (nearly ten years after the death of Lord Massereene). It was valued at £50,000 in 1772. However, not much of it survived the crisis which beset the family in the second half of the 18th century, and also - perhaps - her own expensive lifestyle as a society figure in Dublin and its environs during her long widowhood. She died in 1805.



## **Politics in Co. Antrim and Antrim borough, c.1750-1800**

Up until the 1st Earl of Massereene's fatal policy of perpetuity-leasing, the Massereene estate in Co. Antrim was large enough to give the family a major political interest in the county in addition to their overwhelming interest in the borough. In 1725, for example, their 125 freeholders were the largest single interest on the registry books of the county. 'Election Politics in Antrim Borough' resumes: '... The borough interest was, however, purely a territorial one, while the county interest depended as much on the assistance or at least inactivity of other families as on the territorial strength which the Massereenes themselves possessed.

The leading landowners in the county were the Earls of Antrim and Hertford (the former of whom was effectively debarred from political activity because until c.1730 he was a Roman Catholic), and it was even said that "... if Lord Hertford and he joins the county is a mere borough ...". In spite of this, a member of the Massereene family sat for Co. Antrim throughout the 1727-1760 parliament (and in previous parliaments as well), in addition to the two Massereene nominees who had been returned as a matter of course for Antrim borough. At the general election of 1761, the Massereene family repeated this achievement, though in the county their candidate was only returned at the price of a compromise agreement with Lords Antrim and Hertford. ... The 1761 parliament was in the event the last in which a Skeffington sat for Co. Antrim. The family candidate was defeated at the general election of 1776, and by 1830 the family had even lost interest in keeping the registry of their freeholders up to date. ...

... The real significance of the defeat of 1776 lay in the interaction of Co. Antrim and Antrim borough politics. This was also the year in which the family were first challenged in the borough; and that challenge was part of a movement throughout the county to wrest parliamentary representation from the hands of the few landed aristocrats who had hitherto monopolised it. ... This attack on aristocratic influence received from the outset the powerful support of the Presbyterian clergy and from the late 1770s onwards the added impetus of the Volunteer movement. Lisburn, Lord Hertford's borough, was swept from his control in 1783, and Antrim was the scene of four determined, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempts (in 1776, 1783, 1790 and 1791) to oust the Massereene family. These attempts on Antrim were strongly favoured by particular local circumstances; but they lose much of their significance unless set in the wider context of county politics. ...'



## **Clotworthy Skeffington, 2nd Earl of Massereene (1757-1805)**

The most important of the local circumstances was what A.P.W. Malcomson calls *The extraordinary Career of the 2nd Earl of Massereene* ... in his book with that title (HMSO, 1972), from which the following account is taken. It is probable that the 1st Earl did the Massereene family and estates far more permanent damage than the 2nd. However, it is on the 2nd Earl that all the odium has fallen. '... Well before his death in 1805 and the sensational lawsuit to which his will gave rise, the 2nd Earl had become something of a legend, his career being held up to contemporaries as affording "a striking picture of the vicissitudes of human life". ...

Born in 1743, he inherited the family titles on the death of his father in 1757 and the family estates in Co. Antrim and elsewhere on his own coming of age in 1764. Shortly after his father's death - when he was only fourteen - he had a severe fall from a horse, which occasioned a "contusion of the brain" and, it was widely thought, a weakening of the intellect. ... Having been educated at Harrow and Cambridge, he then went on the Grand Tour. He spent the winter of 1760/1761 in Brussels, and then perhaps proceeded to Italy. In 1763, according to one account, he took advantage of the end of the Seven Years' War to install himself in Paris. It is probable that he remained there, and did not return to Ireland, after he came of age in the following year. Towards the end of 1769, he superseded his mother in the management of his affairs, and granted a power of attorney to two of his Paris associates to manage them in her stead and to raise £10,000 or £12,000 by sale or mortgage of his estate.



## Imprisonment for debt

The cause of this debt was another Paris associate called Vidari, variously described as a Syrian and an Italian, who had inveigled him, by holding out the prospect of swift and large profits, into a hare-brained scheme for supplying salt from the Barbary coast either to France or the Swiss cantons. By January 1770, the debt seems to have risen to £30,000, and it was reported that "his person, though not confined, is in attended custody", and in April that he was "confined ..., his whole estate is gone, and they think in all probability his confinement will be for life". This latter report was an exaggeration, as the Massereene estate ... was easily competent to produce the required amount. Nevertheless, there were many practical difficulties in the way of raising the money. As one of the family's advisers wrote in 1774: "It is a very difficult thing to raise money in England on any Irish estate". The Dowager Lady Massereene was willing to raise £20,000 off her own estate in Derbyshire, but only on terms of future tutelage which Lord Massereene rejected.



*Mary-Ann Barcier, wife of  
3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Massereene*

In gaol he therefore remained. ... According to French law, a defaulting debtor had to undergo a term of twenty-five years' imprisonment, at the end of which his debts were cancelled and himself set free. This term Lord Massereene now settled down to serve, though in fact he remained in prison for only eighteen of the twenty-five. If the manner in which he had run up his debts showed him to be feeble-minded, the fortitude with which he avoided payment of them showed him to be strong-minded to the point of heroism. At first his imprisonment was comfortable, perhaps even luxurious. But later, probably from 1780 onwards, after his transfer from one prison, For L'Eveque, to another, the Hôtel de la Force, it became harsher until, by 1788, he was able to describe it in a frantic appeal he addressed to the British Foreign Secretary as "most close, most cruel and most singularly unjust". His most constant companion was a certain Mary-Anne Barcier, Borcier or Bourcier, also referred to as Mlle de Ceffonds, whom he married while still in prison and who effected his escape during the pre-Revolution ferment which seized Paris in the spring of 1789.



## Re-incarceration

In late November they arrived at Antrim Castle. But Lord Massereene did not long remain there. Instead of devoting himself, as anyone else in the circumstances would have done, to sorting out his long-neglected affairs, he left Antrim almost immediately, returned for a few weeks in 1790 and thereafter was continually absent until March 1797. The intervening years he spent in London. There he repeated all the follies of his Paris sojourn, this time without the extenuation of youth. By the latter half of 1791 his affairs were once again in such confusion that there were rumours that his estate was about to be sold. For this confusion the extravagance of Lady Massereene seems to some degree to have been responsible; but in 1793 they parted, he executing a formal deed of separation by which he settled on her £300 a year for life.

Shortly after the separation he took up lodgings in Hatton Garden, where the "singularities" of his youth began to assume the proportions of serious mental disturbance. There, in circumstances gleefully recounted by counsel during the subsequent proceedings over the validity of his will, he made the acquaintance of Elizabeth Lane or Blackburn, his future second wife, at this time "a menial servant in a house immediately opposite his lodgings". As before, he was thrown into prison for fraudulently incurred debt; and Mrs Blackburn came to live with him there and shared his misfortunes. A lawsuit followed, in which he seems to have been broadly speaking successful; and, thanks to the intervention of his brother-in-law, Lord Leitrim, who advanced him £4,000, he obtained his liberty, only to be thrown back into gaol in 1796. This time, he had to place his estate under trusteeship before his creditors would agree to his release.



## **The battle of Antrim**

In the following year he returned to Antrim, where he installed Mrs Blackburn as mistress of the Castle and himself, and subsisted as best he could on the scanty income which was left him after the terms of the trust had been fulfilled. Antrim was of course the scene of one of the most important actions of the 1798 rebellion, and Lord Massereene was present in Antrim at the time. During the battle of Antrim in June 1798 his yeomanry corps did in fact do useful service by beating off a rebel attack on Antrim Castle and by raking the rebel ranks with cannon-fire from its ramparts. Contrary to his own hyperbolic view of the matter, however, Lord Massereene's personal share in the action was undistinguished.



## Undue influence

In 1802, two years after the death of his first wife, Mrs Blackburn prevailed on him to marry her. In her schemes she was abetted by two natives of Antrim, the O'Dorans. O'Doran Senior had been a Catholic priest, but had conformed to the Church of Ireland and dropped the "O" which had hitherto prefixed his name. His reward was the living of Killead, worth £500 a year, to which Lord Massereene gladly presented him. O'Doran Junior married Lady Massereene (as Mrs Blackburn had now become) after Lord Massereene's death. Together, Lady Massereene and the O'Dorans set out to turn him against his mother, his three brothers and all the old friends and adherents of his family. Having cut him off from all influences except their own, they swiftly achieved the summit of their ambition. In 1804 he made a will leaving a guinea each to his brothers and surviving sister, and everything else he possessed, in real or personal property, to Lady Massereene and her heirs forever. The terms of this will were kept secret until after his death in March 1805.



## **The 3rd Earl of Massereene (1805-1811)**

As soon as the terms of the will became public, his eldest brother, Henry Skeffington, who now succeeded as 3rd Earl of Massereene, declared his intention of contesting it.

In October 1808 the Prerogative Court in Dublin declared the will invalid ... . Henry Lord Massereene followed this verdict up by starting a suit for ejectment in the Court of King's Bench; which Lady Massereene countered by bringing an appeal in Chancery against the decision of the Prerogative Court. The action in the King's Bench was heard at the Co. Antrim assizes in March 1809 before a special jury which was treated to sufficient sensational evidence on Henry Lord Massereene's side to prove that the late Earl had been ... so weak-minded as to fall a prey to every undue or improper influence. ... The special jury, which had probably been to some extent packed by Henry Lord Massereene, found in his favour, and this verdict decided Lady Massereene against proceeding with her appeal in Chancery. She therefore agreed to abandon all her claims to the Massereene estate in return for a lump sum of £15,000 and an annuity of £800 for life. This 'deal' is recorded in a miscellaneous archive in PRONI (D2058), which includes an agreement of 1809 between the Countess of Massereene (widow of the 2nd Earl), George Doran and others, relating to Antrim Castle and demesne and the Massereene estates in Cos Antrim and Monaghan.

The strain thus placed on the Massereene estate was heavy; for Lady Massereene did not die till 1838. On the whole, however, the estate had escaped comparatively lightly from the vagaries of the 2nd Earl. Only a fraction of his Paris debts - some £3,000 - fell as a charge upon it, no money ever having been raised on the bills he passed to Vidari. Of his London debts, those which had been incurred through knavery seem to have been nullified by the courts, and those for which the trust set up in 1797 was responsible seem to have been discharged by 1811.

Moreover, the absence and notorious weak-mindedness of the 2nd Earl had not in the end lost for his family control of the parliamentary borough of Antrim. In March 1809 it was stated in court and in the presence of Chichester Skeffington that Skeffington had made for himself a personal fortune of from £50,000 to £100,000 out of Antrim borough ... . This must have been an exaggeration. But it highlights the succession of military and revenue employments which Henry, William and Chichester Skeffington all procured for themselves on the strength of their two seats in parliament. Chichester Skeffington wrote to his wife just after the decisive election of March 1791: "... The expense was necessary and has been justified by our success, and ... I consider that my attaining a settlement here [being appointed collector of the revenue at Belfast] depended most probably on my success at Antrim ...".'

It was not therefore an unduly encumbered estate which the 3rd Earl of Massereene entered upon in 1809, though this was partly because his mother's Derbyshire estate had borne the brunt of the preceding storm. With hindsight, the most important compensation for the 2nd Earl's vagaries was that the formal Antrim Castle gardens

were spared the naturalising 'improvements' which a more resident and provident owner would almost certainly have inflicted upon them in the age of Capability Brown. Instead, Brown worked at Fisherwick.



## **The 4th Earl of Massereene (1811-1816)**

On the death of the 3rd Earl, unmarried, in 1811 the estate passed to his youngest brother, Chichester, who (as has been seen) had the financial resources to undertake a major rebuilding and enlargement of Antrim Castle in 1811-1813 (two hundred years after Sir Hugh Clotworthy had first built it). When the 4th Earl died in 1816, without issue male, the earldom died with him. However, it was then discovered that the viscounty of Massereene, because of the unusual terms of the patent creating that title, could pass through a woman. The 4th Earl's daughter, Harriet, wife of Colonel the Hon. Thomas Henry Foster of Oriel Temple, Collon, Co. Louth, succeeded accordingly as Viscountess Massereene in her own right, and through her the viscounty has descended to its present bearer.



## The Foster family, c.1660-1779

By comparison with the Skeffingtons, the Fosters were a new family. Malcomson writes in *John Foster: the Politics of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy* (Oxford, 1978): '... The newness of any Anglo-Irish family must of course be viewed in the light of the wholesale displacements and confiscations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet even when viewed against this background, the Fosters stand out as a new family.'

The tradition is that they came over to Ireland in the 1660s as mowers of hay. When they settled in Co. Louth is not clear. The 1666 Hearth Money return for Dunleer parish, where they lived from at least the 1680s to the 1740s, contains the name Samuel Foster; "Samuel" occurs once in the 18th century as a family Christian name, so the likelihood is that this Samuel was John Foster's great-great-grandfather. If so, he will have been the father of Anthony Foster of Dunleer, who in 1683 was named by the charter of Dunleer borough as one of the thirteen original or "charter" burgesses. This Anthony's date of birth is unknown, but he must have been of age in 1683 and he died in 1722. He is the earliest Foster mentioned in Burke's *Peerage*.



*Louth Mower*

In successive editions of that work he is hopefully styled "Colonel" Anthony Foster, but there is no other evidence besides Burke of his military rank. Indeed, Burke is largely responsible for obscuring the important fact of the Fosters' humble origins. ... If Anthony Foster was a colonel, his services were very scantily rewarded. Up to 1698 he seems to have held no land except a customary tenancy of a 270-acre farm in Dunleer; in 1698 he was for the first time granted a lease of his farm. He may have been something more than a mower of hay, but he must certainly have been something less than an erstwhile colonel. The point is settled fairly decisively by the fact that John (Speaker) Foster himself could trace his family no further than one generation beyond "Colonel" Anthony Foster, probably to the Samuel Foster of the Hearth Money return.



## A borough-owning family

Where the Fosters differed from other "new" families is that they were a borough-owning family. As has been seen, Dunleer, where they lived and held land, was a parliamentary borough, and the first Anthony Foster among its original burgesses. The patrons of the borough, the Tenison family, were also the Fosters' landlords in Dunleer, but as the Fosters prospered they grew increasingly independent of landlord control. The Tenisons were negligent patrons, and eventually the Fosters took advantage of their negligence and gained control, by sharp practice if not by actual treachery, of the return for the two seats for the borough. In 1735 they voluntarily surrendered one seat to the Tenisons, and reached a written partition agreement with them which held good until Dunleer was disfranchised at the time of the Union. Possession of half a borough meant that the Fosters entered the category of "inevitable" House of Commons men. John Foster's father, another Anthony, sat for Dunleer, 1737-1760, John Foster himself, 1761-1768, and other members or connections of the Foster family for the rest of the century.



## Law and politics

In other respects, the Fosters were typical of successful, "new", professional families. John Foster's father, Anthony (1705-1779), was the first member of his family to possess - or at least to display - the required combination of legal and parliamentary ability. His father, another John Foster and the son of "Colonel" Anthony Foster, had been a country attorney, but not a barrister, nor had he been an MP (although *Burke's Peerage*, needless to say, states that he was). Anthony Foster was a barrister, and a barrister, moreover, whose surviving papers indicate an extensive practice and an august clientele. He was, as has been seen, the first of the Fosters to enter the House of Commons, and he was also the first to represent Co. Louth - from 1761 to 1766. From 1760 to 1766 he held the office of First Counsel to the Commissioners of the Revenue. In the latter year he retired from the House on appointment as Lord Chief Baron of the Court of Exchequer. Yet, although he retired from the House, he did not retire from politics; nor perhaps was it in the nature of high judicial office in Ireland at this time for a judge to do so. Anthony Foster was the outstanding figure on the Irish bench of his day because of the range of his extra-professional activities, including politics. He was ... an able man whose misfortune it has been to be overshadowed by an even abler son. [He retired from the judicial bench in 1777 and died in 1779.]



## **The build-up of the Foster estate**

If Anthony Foster was the first member of the family to hold a high position in national politics, the building up of the family's local, or territorial, influence was the combined work of several generations, starting with the first Anthony, and still in progress - though with much diminished intensity - in the early nineteenth century. The Foster estate began in Dunleer, and extended ultimately to 1,200 or 1,500 Irish acres in that vicinity, all held on such favourable leasehold terms as to be virtually fee simple. Well before the Dunleer estate was complete, however, the Fosters' centre of gravity had shifted westwards and southwards, towards and over the Louth-Meath border. It is not possible to trace, acre by acre, the process by which this estate, consisting of a solid bloc in the south-west corner of Co. Louth and overspilling into Meath, was built up. But it is clear that the vast majority of it came from one source, the Moore family, who at the dissolution of the monasteries had received an enormous grant of well over 50,000 acres in Louth and Meath.

The head of the Moore family was the Earl of Drogheda, but it was with a cadet branch, the Moores of Ardee, Co. Louth, that the Fosters had their first dealings. The Moores of Ardee possessed at the end of the 17th century an estate worth about £5,000 a year, lying for the most part in and around the town of Ardee. However, in the first thirty years of the 18th century they ran the whole gamut of the insolvent landowner, starting with mortgages and foreclosures and ending with a private act of parliament to allow them to break their family settlement and sell land for debt. The first John Foster and his son, Anthony, figured in this process of disintegration in the dual role of lawyers acting on behalf of the Moores, and speculators in land. By 1746, they had acquired in fee simple virtually all the remaining estate of the Moores of Ardee, though no precise acreage figure can be put upon their acquisitions. From the head of the Moore family, Lord Drogheda, the Fosters acquired from 1714 onwards, either directly or indirectly, something like 2,500 Irish acres including the village and estate of Collon, where they established their seat in the early 1740s. The likelihood is that well over half the Foster estate in Louth and Meath, which totalled 6,500 acres in 1778, came from the Moore family as a whole.

By 1778 the estate was approaching its maximum extent. The gross rental, which in 1778 was £4,854, more than doubled between then and roughly 1820, to £10,120: but additions to the acreage accounted for only £1,223 of this increase. Indeed it could be said that the acreage already approached its maximum extent by about 1750, when it stood at roughly 6,000. Since the Fosters were a new family, none of the estate had come to them by patent or by inheritance. It had all been pieced together painfully, by purchase, often in units smaller than a townland, and the process of purchasing had started only in the very late 17th or very early 18th century. This was a remarkable achievement, which had severely stretched the Fosters' limited resources.



## **Anthony Foster (1705-1779), the "great improver"**

Once the period of heavy purchasing was over, the period of heavy expenditure on improvements began. This was the work of Chief Baron Anthony Foster (although the process continued by his successors), and earned him Arthur Young's celebrated epithet of "... great improver, a title more deserving estimation than that of a great general or a great Minister ..." Young's account of Collon, the Fosters' seat and the centre of their estate, suggests that Anthony Foster poured his professional earnings (which can hardly have exceeded three thousand guineas a year) into the improvement of the estate on an altogether staggering scale. From what Young says, and what he implies, the sums which Foster spent in this way must have been in the region of £50,000, spread over a period no longer than twenty or twenty-two years. No wonder Young declared that the improvements "... were of a magnitude I have never heard of before".

Young accepted Chief Baron Anthony Foster's testimony that they had been "exceedingly profitable". This would certainly have been the case if the £50,000 had been Anthony Foster's own; but the likelihood is that much of it had to be borrowed. Moreover, Young probably overestimated the financial advantages from the improvements because he underestimated the income which the Fosters were getting from their estate before the improvements began. Certainly, a rental of the estate for the years 1778-1782 suggests (though it is a difficult document to interpret) that the Fosters were so burdened with debt that they were unable to live within their landed income over this four-year period. ... By 1799 John (Speaker) Foster's debts were popularly reckoned at £30,000 - which was an understatement; and by 1810 they had reached the alarming figure of £72,000.



## **John (Speaker) Foster (1740-1828)**

John (Speaker) Foster was born in 1740, he died in his eighty-ninth year, in 1828, and was politically active almost to the end. He first entered the Irish Parliament in 1761, when not quite of age, as member for the family borough of Dunleer, Co. Louth. In 1768, two years after his father's retirement from the House, he succeeded him as MP for Co. Louth and represented the county uninterruptedly till his elevation to the peerage of the United Kingdom as Lord Oriel in 1821, by which time he was the Father of the House of Commons at Westminster.

His career as a prominent figure in national politics, and more specifically his official career, was understandably not so long and not so uninterrupted; but it was still, by an reasonable standards, both. He served first as Chairman of the Committee of Supply and Ways and Means, 1777-1784, then as Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1784-1785, then as Speaker of the House of Commons, 1785-1800, and finally, returning to a former office, as Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer, 1784-1785, then as Speaker of the House of Commons, 1785-1800, and finally, returning to a former office, as Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer at Westminster, 1804-1806 and 1807-1811.

As will be apparent from these dates, the only long interruption in his official career came in the years immediately following the Union in 1800, after he had distinguished himself as the most influential opponent of that measure. With the exception of these years, and of the year 1806-1807, it can fairly be said that between 1784 and 1811 he held the highest political offices (the Irish speakership being a political office) to which under normal circumstances an Irish politician could aspire.



## **A period of rapid political change**

It can also fairly be said that he lived through a period of exceptionally rapid and dramatic political change, especially in Ireland. Foster was opposed to almost all of these changes. He publicly, and perhaps privately, supported the Octennial Act of 1768. He publicly (though belatedly) supported the Constitution of 1782, and he later came to see and to exploit its potential; but at the time he was privately fearful of the consequences and very uneasy at the nature of the agitation which extorted the constitution of 1782 from the British government. ... He led (as has been seen) the opposition to the Union in 1799-1800. And though he supported and contributed to the measures of 1778 and 1782 removing the disabilities of the Catholics in matters of property and religion, he made the most effective speech in parliament against their readmission to the parliamentary franchise in 1793, and thereafter he was the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy's most effective spokesman against Catholic Emancipation (notably in the first post-Union debate on the subject, in 1805), until succeeded in that role by his nephew and political heir, John Leslie Foster.

To all these measures Foster applied the touchstone, would they undermine the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, either indirectly by weakening the British connection, or directly by reforming the Irish representation or admitting Catholics to a participation in political power. For all his political importance, he was always on the defensive (except in his cherished sphere of economic affairs). His characteristic political posture was making the best of what he considered a bad job - even as bad a job as the Union ... .



## Foster and the Union

Basically, his conception of the Ascendancy was the *status quo* of 1782; and 1782 marked his *ne plus ultra*, not because of the Constitution established in that year, but because of the Catholic Relief Acts passed. The Constitution of 1782 was a child which he merely adopted, and certainly had not fathered. In 1799-1800 he defended it as loyally as its father, Grattan, but in reality what he was defending was not the Constitution of 1782, nor even the Irish Parliament, but the Ascendancy.

His behaviour immediately after the Union, shows that it was the Ascendancy which he was defending at the time, and also shows his ability to identify the new interests of the Ascendancy after a dramatic shift in the political kaleidoscope. In February 1801, when Pitt's moral commitment to round off the Union with Catholic Emancipation transpired, Foster wrote: "... The Union has accomplished for them [the Irish Catholics] the Reform without which they could never hope to be of consequence in Parliament. The Emancipation now projected takes away their disability. They will soon feel how little they will be in Britain, how great they would be here [Ireland]. They will look to restoring the Parliament ...; and if this comes to pass, a Catholic Government and consequent separation will be the effect. ..." In another letter he added the trenchant sentence: "... I shall not be surprised if the loyal men who opposed ... [the Union] by their advice shall be its supporters by their arms ..." For himself, Foster saw it as his duty, in the altered circumstances of the years after 1801, to support the Union by taking office in the United Parliament. ...



## **Politics and economics**

Outside the political sphere, in his own chosen sphere of economic affairs, Foster was much more creative, constructive and flexible, and certainly not reactionary. His emphasis on economic affairs, and particularly on the economic role of the Irish Parliament, was partly a matter of personal aptitude and inclination. But its real significance is that he saw in prosperity not just a palliative, but a cure, for political discontent; the search for prosperity, in other words, was the obverse and positive side to his negative resistance to any and every political encroachment on the *status quo* of 1782.

Prosperity was a cure rather than a palliative because, in Foster's eyes, the ill was socio-economic, not political. It was his conviction that the great mass of the Catholic people were "incompetent" even to understand the Emancipation issue. There is nowhere a policy statement from Foster that the best way to kill Emancipation was with economic kindness. But his letters teem with a juxtaposing of political news and reports on the state of the harvest, weather, and so on. At first, this juxtaposing seems accidental; but close reading of, for example, the long run of letters to ... [his old friend, the 1st Earl of] Sheffield, conveys the strong impression that it is deliberate and reflects an instinctive thought-process. An isolated, but more explicit, instance occurs in a letter to [the Prime Minister, Spencer] Perceval, written in June 1811: "... as to this Country [Louth], I never saw more content nor less disposition to think of politics or Popery or Protestantism. Every man gets full employment, and there is plenty of work even for women and children. ..."



## **'Prosperity by Act of Parliament'**

The measures taken in the period 1782-1800 to boost and protect Irish manufacturers and agriculture - essentially, the economic policy pursued by Foster - are not above criticism, and the trend of modern scholarship has been to cast doubt on the effectiveness of 'prosperity by Act of Parliament'. For example, ... Foster can probably be accused of exaggerating the economic case for a separate Irish Parliament and, more generally, the efficacy of protectionism ... . However, what was important, and indisputably successful, were the measures of the period 1782-1800 with which he was prominently associated, regulating Ireland's external trade with Great Britain, with other parts of the Empire, with the United States, and with France.

The Constitution of 1782 provided no machinery for a harmonizing of British and Irish interests in this wide sphere. In a sense, the Constitution of 1782 increased Ireland's bargaining power: Foster's Corn Law of 1784 anticipated and perhaps accelerated the moment when Ireland became a net exporter and Great Britain a net importer of wheat (the moment had already come in the case of oats); and it is questionable whether a British Privy Council which retained the right to amend Irish legislation would have allowed him to enact the law on terms so favourable to Ireland. In a more important sense, however, the Constitution of 1782 weakened Ireland's bargaining power. By failing to recognize Great Britain's right to legislate for Ireland in matters of external trade, it left Great Britain free to legislate without regard to Ireland. In fact, Ireland had no bargaining power, and was reliant on British goodwill. All depended on skilful negotiation between men like Foster and his English opposite numbers, and on tactful draftsmanship, which would keep Irish legislation in line with British, without arousing the hypersensitivities of the Irish Parliament in constitutional matters. The failure of the Commercial Propositions of 1785 was a failure of negotiation and draftsmanship; and its effect, combined with the success of the Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1787, was to make France rather than Ireland for a short time Great Britain's most favoured nation. But this was an isolated, though spectacular, failure, which was offset by a substantial amount of unobtrusive success. ...



## Preoccupations and priorities

John Foster's preoccupation with economic affairs is reflected in his papers. Many of them - perhaps as much as two-thirds of the total - have been destroyed, but the destruction was, as far as is known, accidental; and though he sorted and filed them during the years of his retirement, he made no attempt to weed out the less important, and destroy them. This means that a bundle of tradesmen's accounts for the 1770s has had as good a chance of survival as papers relating to major matters of national policy. ...'

It means also that what has survived gives a rough-and-ready idea of Foster's priorities. As the classification scheme, or table of contents, of D207 and D562 make abundantly clear, what was probably Foster's prime concern was the Irish linen industry, in all its bearings, followed by wool, cotton, corn, agriculture generally, bog-reclamation, roads, canals, trade, post-Union budgets and government loans, etc, etc. All manner of local concerns, many of them exceedingly minor, are also copiously represented - as befits the archive of a man who was MP for a county constituency from 1768 to 1821. There is a suspicious dearth of material on Catholic Relief, Catholic Emancipation and the Union (to name only the most obvious political issues of the day), and possibly high politics are under-represented in what survives.

Nevertheless, the abiding impression is that this is indeed the archive of a man who was three times Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer and was referred to, even though no such office existed, as the 'Chief Trustee of the Linen Manufacture', better known as the Linen Board. It is probably not a coincidence that the Linen Board, which had been under threat for some time, was abolished soon after his death.



## **Foster's wife and children**

Foster had married, in 1766, his first cousin, Margaretta Burgh of Bert, Co. Kildare. It was a poor match from the point of view of worldly goods, but a love match to the end. Nothing can be more moving than the memorial urn which Foster, then in his eighties, erected to his wife's memory, and which now stands in the family burial ground in the Antrim Castle gardens, to which it was removed from Collon, probably in 1920. Possibly because of their consanguinity, the Fosters suffered heavy losses in the deaths of children in infancy and youth. In the end, there was one surviving daughter, Anna, who married Sir James Stevenson Blackwood of Clandeboye, Co. Down, later 2nd Baron Dufferin, in 1799, and died at a very advanced age in 1865, and one surviving son and heir, Thomas Henry Foster. Foster's wife, who had been created Baroness Oriel in 1790 and Viscountess Ferrard in 1797, both in the peerage of Ireland, died in 1824. Foster was created Baron Oriel in the peerage of the UK on his retirement from the House of Commons in 1821, and died in 1828.



## Thomas Henry Foster, 2nd Viscount Ferrard (1772-1843)



Thomas Henry Foster,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Ferrard

Thomas Henry Foster was educated at Eton and Cambridge, and represented Dunleer in the Irish parliament from 1792 to 1800. He was Colonel of the Louth Militia, 1793-1816, and took this responsibility with painstaking seriousness; so much so that Lord Cornwallis, the Lord Lieutenant and no friend of Foster's father, declared in 1799 that the Louth Militia was the 'best disciplined' of all. After the Union, Thomas Foster was a Governor of Co. Louth, 1803-1843, sat for the adjoining county borough of Drogheda, 1807-1812, and later sat for Co. Louth itself, 1821-1824. He was not really a politician, but by virtue of the family's political importance, held office as a Commissioner of the Irish Revenue, 1798-1799, and a Supernumerary Lord of the Irish Treasury, 1807-1813.

In 1810 he took the single most important action in his family's history by marrying Harriet Skeffington. As Malcomson comments in *The Pursuit of the Heiress: Aristocratic Marriage in Ireland, 1750-1800* (Belfast, 1982): '... Although she was, in prospect, a great heiress, in the eyes of the law nobody was an heiress until everyone who stood between the inheritance and her was dead, and dead childless. In 1810, Chichester Skeffington, Harriet Skeffington's father, observed: "... the lady's fortune ... is only £5,000, without pledge or security for more, [but] with such a moral probability as perfectly satisfies ...". Settlements, however, were based on legal certainty, not moral probability. The settlement made on Harriet Skeffington's marriage took no account of, and did not even mention, her position as heiress *presumptive* to the Massereene family estate [which had a rental of over £5,500 per annum by 1819 (D562/64, quoted by Campbell and Rice)]. This was of course because her father's two older brothers, one of them the 3rd Earl of Massereene, and both bachelors in their mid-sixties, were still alive in 1810; and even after her father succeeded as 4th Earl in the following year, although it was highly probable that she, as his only child, would succeed him in due course, this was not certain until his death, without subsequent issue, in 1816. ...'



## **Two estates in tandem**

Following these developments, Thomas Foster and his wife, now Lady Massereene, who had hitherto lived at Oriel Temple, Collon, made Antrim Castle their principal place of residence. In 1817, Thomas Foster changed his name to Skeffington. His mother had been Viscountess Ferrard since 1797, and his father was created Baron Oriel in 1821. So, the death of either parent threatened to remove Thomas Skeffington from the House of Commons. In the event, it was Lady Ferrard who died first, in 1824, when Thomas Skeffington succeeded as 2nd Viscount Ferrard. He obtained a seat in the House of Lords when his father died in 1828. Lady Massereene died soon afterwards, in 1831, and the Massereene estates passed under the family settlements to their eldest son, John, who now succeeded as 10th Viscount Massereene.

Soon after the 10th Viscount's coming-of-age in 1833, an unseemly and distressing lawsuit broke out between his father and him. This was over the unsecured debts which Lord Ferrard had for the most part inherited and which he now needed Lord Massereene's consent to charge on the Foster estate. This lawsuit lasted from at least 1835 to 1838 and probably until 1843. Lord Ferrard died in 1843, at which date the Foster estates in Louth and the Massereene estates in Antrim were for the first time completely merged.



## **John Skeffington, 10th Viscount Massereene and 3rd Viscount Ferrard (1812-1863)**

Beyond his part in the lawsuit of Lord Massereene v Lord Ferrard, not very much is known about the 10th Viscount: there is no surviving family correspondence beyond the death of his father in 1843. In 1844 he obtained a grant of new arms from Ulster King of Arms (which is framed and in the possession of the present Lord Massereene), eliminating the Foster quarterings previously borne; presumably this was a symbolic and retrospective snub to his father and to his Foster ancestry. He married in 1835, without the approval of at least one of his relations, the 2nd Earl of Leitrim, who complained on 8 August of that year, about Lord Massereenes 'wretched match' with Miss [Olivia Deane] Grady, ten years his senior 'and with a very low, vulgar and unprincipled family'.

In his early years, he was not resident in Antrim Castle (probably because he was travelling on the Continent). The already-quoted O.S. memoir of 1835 records: '... [The grounds of Antrim Castle] are kept in the nicest order. The public are admitted to them and the castle at all times, and it is much visited by strangers. The people of Antrim enjoy a most agreeable privilege in having at all times access to the delightful walks about the castle, and they are much frequented by them. ...' Campbell and Rice write: '... The 10th Viscount seems to have been responsible for the creation of the Castle's stables (now the Clotworthy Arts Centre), which were built in a neo-Tudor style [probably to the design of the future Sir Charles Lanyon] in the 1840s, in coarse rubble basalt with sandstone dressings. A large ornamental gateway with double turrets flanked a courtyard with two-storey wings ending in elaborate Flemish gables. ... On 16 November 1845, the 10th Viscount cut the first sod of the Belfast and Ballymena Railway, and by 1858 the Great Northern Railway line had cut a thin slice off the south western corner of the Deer Park. ...'

Conway and Reeves-Smyth add: '... The formal gardens were expanded to the west during the 1840s and 1850s - enlargements that are illustrated on the 1840s [i.e. 1844] demesne map and the 1857 Ordnance Survey ... . These improvements included the creation of an area of trees and shrubs with [a] central fountain, known as "the Labyrinth" further to the north. Also at this time, the area occupied by the old stable yard and eastern bastion was transformed into "her ladyship's pleasure grounds", an informal area of shrubs and flowers with "arbours, tunnels and winding paths" ...'.

C.H. O'Neill's *Antrim Castle* of 1860 contains, as perhaps its most important feature, a virtual tour of the interior of the castle as it was in the 10th Viscount's time. Since neither the present Lord Massereene nor PRONI is aware of the existence of any plans of the castle, O'Neill's account, for all the quaintness of his language, is extremely useful in establishing the internal layout of the building. This is important to an understanding of the progress of the fire in 1922, and also - because of the minuteness of O'Neill's descriptions of many of the contents - in assessing the losses in that conflagration.

In public life, the 10th Viscount served as a D.L. Co. Antrim from 1846, as Colonel of the Royal Antrim (Militia) Regiment of Artillery from 1852, and in 1851 became the first and only member of his family to be created a Knight of St Patrick.

He was killed in 1863 by a fall from his horse in the grounds of Antrim Castle. He was the second member of his family to die in this way; for the 1st Earl of Massereene had been killed, under mysterious and, according to O'Neill, supernatural circumstances, while out 'fowling' in the demesne in 1757.



## **Clotworthy John Skeffington, 11th Viscount Massereene and 4th Viscount Ferrard (1842-1905)**

The 11th Viscount Massereene was Lieutenant of Co. Louth, 1870-1898, and Custos Rotulorum from 1879. He married in 1870 Florence Elizabeth, only daughter of the novelist and poet, George John Whyte-Melville of Bennochy, Fifeshire. She died in 1929. All her married life, she strove to combat her husband's tendency to drink excessively (and the ingenuity with which he evaded her vigilance); this weakness gave rise to the celebrated description of him, as he walked unsteadily along St James's Street, 'There goes Lord Massereene and Ferrard, and they're both drunk'.

The main event of the 11th Viscount's career was the operation of the Plan of Campaign on the Collon estate. This is not documented in the Foster/Massereene papers, but is reflected in account books and rentals (D3711) relating to the various estates for which Alfred H. Wynne and two successive John Emersons, all three of Collon, acted as agents, c.1870-1925. The collection spans the period of the Plan of Campaign and relates partly to the Massereene estate, which is of particular interest as the only estate in Co. Louth where the tenants combined to demand a reduction of rent and then adopted the Plan of Campaign. The following pages from *Incidents of Coercion: a Journal of Visits to Ireland in 1882 and 1888, by the Rt Hon. G. Shaw Lefevre, MP* (London, 1889), give a summary of events:

'... At Collon we were fortunate enough to find at his house Mr Wynne, the late agent of Lord Massereene, and I heard from him an account of the dispute between Lord Massereene and his tenants ... . Mr Wynne is the agent for many other large proprietors in this district. In 1886, when the great fall of prices occurred, he advised all his employers that [rent] abatements should be made to the tenants of ... [15% to 20%]. Lord Massereene alone refused to take his advice, and actually dismissed him from his post as agent, for his leniency to the tenants. In all the other cases his advice was followed, and as a result no difficulty has occurred ... .

Mr Wynne had no doubt that an arrangement might have been arrived at on this estate in 1886 without difficulty; he held, however, that the tenants were on their part to blame for entering into a combination so speedily, and without waiting longer to see whether Lord Massereene would make concessions. He thought that some of the tenants were able to pay their full rents; he considered that there would be no difficulty now in settling the dispute if it were not for some of the leaders of the movement who had been evicted; and that the difficulties of a settlement had been increased by the violent speeches which had been made. He thought that Lord Massereene, who was open to reason, should not be called upon to humiliate himself by reinstating these leaders of the movement in the farms from which they had been evicted. ...

Lord Massereene's property in the county of Louth [and county of Meath] consists of [over 9,000 acres leased to] about 200 tenants, with a rental of £6,000 a year. Some of the tenants are men of substance, with large farms; others are very poor, with holdings of from five to ten acres; but the bulk of them hold farms of between twenty

and thirty acres. It is admitted on all hands that there was no better or more orderly class of tenants in the North of Ireland.



## **An unflattering comparison with Lord Clanricarde**

A review of the dispute between the Massereene tenants and their landlord ... ending in its climax, the imprisonment [in 1888] of Mr [John] Dillon [Nationalist MP for East Mayo, on a charge of conspiracy], shows a striking similitude in all its main features to that of the Clanricarde tenants [i.e. those on the huge estate of the Marquess of Clanricarde in east Galway]. ...

In both cases the landlords refused to act on the advice of their agents or to make reasonable abatements of rent, such as other good landlords were freely making at that time, and parted with their agents in consequence of their having given this advice; in both cases they refused to recognise any common action on the part of their tenants, or even to negotiate with them as a body; in both cases this unwise action of the landlords was followed by strict combination on the part of the tenants and their refusal to pay full rents without a reasonable abatement; in both cases evictions were then carried out by the landlords, supported by the forces of the Crown and the penal powers of the Coercion Act, and every possible effort has been made, by harassing proceedings in the law courts, to break down the combination; ... in both cases the landlords have lately shown, by their offers to concede large abatements of arrears of rent accruing since the disputes arose, that they now admit that they were wrong in the first instance in refusing to listen to the demands of their tenants; [and] in both cases there have been added to the difficulties of settlement the legal costs which have been piled up, and the position of the evicted tenants, who, it is now practically admitted, were unjustly evicted. ...'

In this same period, the Massereene estate in Co. Antrim comprised 11,778 acres, with an annual valuation of £8,650. In 1887, as has been seen, the 11th Viscount further enlarged Antrim Castle. In 1895 he created Massereene Golf Club, under the presidency of himself, on the northern part of the Antrim Castle demesne, beyond the Six Mile Water. He died in 1905.



## **Algernon William John Skeffington, 12th Viscount Massereene and 5th Viscount Ferrard (1873-1956)**

The 12th Viscount Massereene was educated at Winchester and Sandhurst. He was commissioned in the 17th Lancers in 1895, saw action throughout the South African War, 1899-1902, was wounded, mentioned in despatches and awarded the DSO, and retired as a brevet major in 1907. He became a major (TA) in the North Irish Horse in that year. He later served in the early years of the First World War under General Allenby in the Middle East, where he found Lawrence of Arabia 'impossible'.

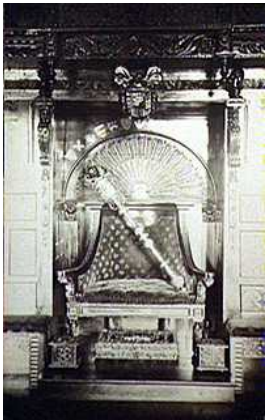
In 1905 he married (as his first wife) Jean Barbara, second daughter of Sir John Stirling Ainsworth, Bt, MP, of Ardanaiseig, Loch Awe, Argyllshire. Lord Massereene succeeded to the title in the same year, and was appointed Lieutenant of Co. Antrim. Although his father-in-law was a Liberal MP and Home Ruler, Lord Massereene was a Conservative and Unionist. In spite of his position as a D.L. for Co. Antrim, he is supposed to have sat in his chauffeur-driven car looking on with approval as guns were run into Larne Harbour in 1912. He was Lieutenant of Co. Antrim, 1916-1938. From 1921 to 1929 he was Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and a member of the Northern Ireland Senate.



*Jean Ainsworth, Viscountess Massereene and Ferrard*



## The Antrim Castle fire



*John Foster's chair as  
Speaker in Irish House  
of Commons*

Lord Massereene, his family and a house party were present in Antrim Castle when it was burnt by the IRA in 1922. Many items of great historical importance, most notably the Chair of the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, which was the centrepiece of a venerable, but highly inflammable, 'Oak Room', were destroyed in the fire. But the presence of mind of Lord Massereene and his staff, and the length of time which it takes for a very large house to be consumed by a fire, saved much that would otherwise have been lost. The daughter of the Archbishop of Armagh, who was staying at the time, was nearly lost, but jumped out of a window. A 900-piece, soft paste, 'Etruscan Honeysuckle' dinner service of Foster provenance was thrown from the drawing-room windows into the Six Mile Eater, but few pieced survived the experience, and then only in a battered state. Much furniture, some of it large, was rescued.

More would have been rescued, except that the townspeople of Antrim, who turned out in large numbers to help, thought that the most important thing to be saved was the billiard table. Thirty men laboured successfully to get it out of the castle.

Among the major survivals were the family portraits. A comparison with the portraits itemised by C.H. O'Neill in 1860 and those surviving in family possession today, suggests a rescue operation of almost miraculous success (although it has to be remembered that many portraits and other important pieces were probably in the London town house in 1922, or with the Dowager Lady Massereene at her house in Hampshire). Other major survivals were Anthony and John (Speaker) Foster's important collection of pamphlets, which had been in the Antrim Castle library since at least 1863 (when a library catalogue was printed). The Foster papers, which had probably only recently arrived at Antrim Castle, following the sale of Oriel Temple in 1920, survived because they had been placed in the stable block, not in the Castle itself. This possibly accounts for the much lower survival-rate of the Massereene papers.

The late (13th) Viscount Massereene, who was a small boy at the time, had vivid recollections of the fire. He remembered being trapped with his mother in a light well (from which they narrowly escaped, and being told by her that they were going to die there. Most clearly of all, he remembered the nursery cat with its fur on fire.



## The period 1922-1956

After the fire, Lord Massereene went to live in the nearby dower house, Skeffington Lodge (now the Deer Park Hotel). Further losses of family treasures – this time by sale, not by fire – now followed. Gilbert Stuart's famous full-length portrait of John (Speaker) Foster, painted in 1791, was sold to America, and is now in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas, Missouri; by a fortunate coincidence, a smaller-scale replica, also by Gilbert Stuart, remains in Northern Ireland, having been inherited by the Speaker's daughter, Anna Foster, Lady Dufferin, and having passed to her successors in the Dufferin title. The mace of the Speaker of the Irish of Commons was sold in 1933, to the Bank of Ireland, where it is preserved and displayed in its College Green headquarters in Dublin, formerly the Irish Parliament House; but, as the interior of the House of Commons has not survived, it is to be seen in the Chamber of the House of *Lords*.

Plans in the possession of the present Lord Massereene show that the Belfast architects, Tulloch & Fitzsimmons, were asked in 1930 to design a two-storey, neo-Tudor house to be built on the site of the castle (information provided by Terence Reeves-Smyth). But nothing came of this. Following the death of his first wife in 1937, Lord Massereene married as his second wife in 1940 his second cousin, Florence Clementina, daughter of the Hon. Sydney William Skeffington (1849-1876). After the Second World War, Skeffington Lodge was abandoned, and the c.1840 Antrim Castle stable block was converted for use as a family residence, and was re-named Clotworthy House. It was let for over ten years following the death of Lord Massereene in 1956. It was then acquired by Antrim Borough Council, and was converted for use as its Arts Centre in 1992.

For present purposes, the most important contribution made by the 12th Viscount Massereene was the transfer to PRONI, in 1926, 1931, 1942 and 1948, of the two biggest sections of the Foster/Massereene papers (D207 and D562). D562 would have been consigned to the pulp drive during the Second World War, except that in 1942 Lord Massereene was serving with the then Deputy Keeper of the Records, Dr D.A. Chart, on a committee which was set up to avert the loss of heritage material in this good cause. Most of the subsequent deposits of Foster/Massereene papers were made by Lord Massereene's son and successor, the late (13th) Viscount (1914-1992) in 1963 and 1969, and by the present (14th) Viscount Massereene in 1995. The archive therefore has a history which, if not as long, is certainly as complicated as that of the Massereene family.



## The archive

The c.26,000 Foster/Massereene papers are divided into seven sections, plus an eight and ninth from different provenances:

- (1) D207 – 4,700 documents. (Copied as MIC511.)
- (2) D562 – 18,000 documents. (Copied as MIC500.)
- (3) D1739 (Clotworthy House papers) - 200 documents.
- (4) D2681 – 163 documents.
- (5) D4084 (Chilham papers) - 3,330 documents. (Withdrawn material copied as MIC611, and correspondence copied as T2519/4.)
- (6) T2519/4 – 2,400 documents. (Photocopies of the original correspondence, which is closed to the public, in D4084. T2519/1-3 and 5-16 comprise photocopies of Foster-related papers in other institutions.)
- (7) MIC618 – printed matter and a few family letters.
- (8) D3711 (Emerson papers, not actually of Foster/Massereene provenance).
- (9) MIC251 (Cooper papers, also not of Foster-Massereene provenance).

Unfortunately this very large archive is subject to considerable problems of lay-out and arrangement.

The first reason is that the archive, as its name implies, is not one archive but two archives in one. The Foster and Massereene families, as has been seen, were distinct until they intermarried in 1810. They coalesced in 1816 with the death of the last Earl of Massereene, separated again in 1831 and did not finally merge until 1843. The overwhelming bulk of the archive relates to the period before 1816, but the Foster and Massereene components of the archive are at times confusingly intermingled. The confusion would be greater were it not for the fact that the Massereene side of the archive represents a small proportion of the whole - perhaps 2,300 items out of 26,000.

The second reason for the problems of arrangement is the nature of the Foster family filing-system. The vast majority of the Foster side of the archive are the papers of John (Speaker) Foster. Foster organised the bundling and filing of his own and his family's papers, and was not consistent in the methods he employed. Broadly speaking, it is safe to say that in the period up to 1800 he bundled papers together according to topics, and in the period after 1800 according to date and the index letter of his correspondents' names. This inconsistent method of filing and bundling has added greatly to the difficulties of calendaring the Foster papers. In general John Foster's own system has been adhered to unless there seemed to be good reason for departing from it.

The final reason for the problems of arrangement is that the six separate sections of the Foster/Massereene papers were deposited piecemeal in PRONI (as already described). There is therefore no logic behind the division of the archive into six

sections. This division merely reflects the different dates of deposit. There are many instances where, for example, a letter is to be found in one section of the archive and a copy of John Foster's reply to it in another, and so on.

It is therefore necessary for any searcher interested in a topic or an individual represented in the Foster/Massereene collection to go through the table of contents at the beginning of *each* of the six sections of the papers. There is for example a bundle of correspondence between John Foster and Spencer Perceval in D207, but there is more of the same correspondence in D562. It would seem on the face of things to be logical for these two halves of the one correspondence to be reunited either in D207 or D562. But this in practice is not possible, because any re-sorting of a collection upsets the references which research students have already made. This makes it necessary for subsequent students to master the arrangement of the collection as it stands, and to learn to work within its limitations.

There are some general rules which will make it easier to use the six separate sections:



### ***D1739 (Clotworthy House papers)***

This section of the archive is the smallest, the most homogeneous and the one which needs least comment. Basically it relates to the Massereene family estates in Antrim, Monaghan, Kerry, Dublin and Derbyshire from the 1840s to the 1940s. There are also a few earlier Massereene estate papers, dating from the 17th to the early 19th century. Of these, the most important (D1739/3/1A) is a volume of near-contemporary copies of 17th-century deeds and case papers, which was transcribed by PRONI in c.1925 (T472). Though the bulk of these papers relate to the period after the merger with the Fosters in 1816, they contain almost nothing on the Foster estate in Louth and Meath. There is no correspondence in D1739.



### ***D207***

This consists almost entirely of Foster papers, though there are a few Massereene estate papers for the 17th and early 18th centuries. It contains no Massereene correspondence.

There is a certain amount of 17th and 18th century material relating to the Foster estate and family finances and a certain amount of miscellaneous material; but the vast majority of the papers in D207 are the correspondence of John Foster in the period 1804-1811.

Many of the topics and correspondents represented in this correspondence are also well represented in D562. But as a general, though not unvarying, rule, D207 contains letters from John Foster's most prominent correspondents - prime ministers, lords lieutenant, chief secretaries, authors etc. - in short, from people who are likely to be of interest in their own right.



There are sub-sections dealing with the Louth militia and Drogheda politics, though in general the Fosters' papers and correspondence on local topics are concentrated in D562.

There is also a sub-section of Foster family correspondence, 1800-1830, but this type of correspondence is also represented in D562, D4084, T2519/4 and MIC618.



### **D562**

This is the largest single section of the collection, and therefore the most difficult to handle. It contains, first of all, *all* the Massereene family correspondence, dating from the 1680s to the 1830s, except for a comparatively small quantity in T2519/4. It contains virtually *no* Massereene estate papers as opposed to estate correspondence.

It contains at least as much and probably more 18th century papers and correspondence on the Foster estate and family finances as D207 does. It also contains almost *all* the legal case papers of Anthony Foster (b.1705: d.1779) as barrister and judge, and almost *all* the papers and correspondence of Anthony and John Foster dealing with Louth elections, politics, patronage and local affairs.

The rest of D562 is devoted to the official papers and correspondence of John Foster in the various offices he held from 1777 to 1811. His correspondents are, in the main, much less distinguished figures than those represented in D207, though there is a certain amount of overlap between the two. D562 contains almost all of John Foster's official papers for the period up to 1800, but it also contains even more of his official correspondence in the first decade of the 19th century than D207 does. In D562 there are many more returns, statistics, abstracts, estimates, memoranda, draft bills etc., etc. than there are in D207, which is largely confined to correspondence. Like all rules relating to the Foster/Massereene collection, however, this one should not be pressed too far.



### **D2681**

This comprises 163 'stray' documents of a most miscellaneous kind, including: contemporary copies of letters and papers concerning a dispute between the 2nd Viscount Massereene and the Duke of York over lands in Co. Antrim, July 1682; sermons, writings, etc, of Archbishop Bolton, c.1740; miscellaneous correspondence about politics, patronage and estate management in Cos Antrim and Louth, 1755-1854; a notebook kept by John Foster, 1787-1791, referring, among innumerable miscellaneous topics, to the work of Berenger and De Gr,e at Oriel Temple, Collon; an incomplete letter from Thomas Foster to his father, John Foster, about the Peninsular War, c.1808; letters discussing Foster's political situation before and after his resignation as Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer at Westminster in 1811; the affair of Queen Caroline, George IV's visit to Ireland, Foster's eventual elevation to the peerage and the Catholic Question, 1820-1825; a letter from the 2nd Lord Dufferin to his brother-in-law,

Thomas Foster, now 2nd Viscount Ferrard, about a loan from Ferrard and about the Donaghadee-Portpatrick packet service, 1824; and correspondence about the 12th Viscount Massereene's claim for compensation for the Antrim Castle fire, 1922-1923.



### ***D4084 (Chilham papers)***

This contains deeds and estate papers for both the Massereene and Foster estates. Apart from title deeds, settlements and wills, there are good runs of leases for Antrim town, and for the Massereene estate in Co. Monaghan, from the 17th century. It also contains the originals of the correspondence photocopied and catalogued as T2519/4 (below) and a small additional group, consisting mainly of letters to Thomas Foster, Viscount Ferrard.



### ***T2519/4***

This consists exclusively of photocopied correspondence, the originals of which are closed. It is perhaps the most heterogeneous section of the six as it contains correspondence from all members of the Massereene and Foster families on every conceivable topic. Consequently it is impossible to draw any distinction between T2519/4 on the one hand and D207 and D562 on the other. They overlap at almost every point.



### ***MIC618***

This consists of microfilms of printed legal proceedings over the will of the 2nd Earl of Massereene, 1809, a scrapbook containing letters to Anna, Lady Dufferin from her parents, etc., 1785-1828, and C.H. O'Neill's *Antrim Castle*, 1860.



### ***D3711 (Emerson papers)***

These comprise c.20 volumes, deriving from the agents Alfred H. Wynne and John Emerson Senior and Junior, who acted (inter alia) for the Collon estate, in Co. Louth, in the period 1865-1925. The earliest volume is a timber book, 1825-1832, apparently recording tenants' planting on the Collon estate [of the 1st Lord Oriel and 2nd Viscount Ferrard]. The rest are rent receipt books/account books recording Collon estate and other receipts, 1865-1925, but principally 1872-1906.



### ***MIC251 (Cooper papers)***

These comprise six volumes of account books, 1787-c.1830, of Austin Cooper, including accounts relating to the Massereene estate in Co. Monaghan for which he acted as agent. (Another PRONI archive, the papers of the Hill family of Brook Hall, Londonderry City (D642), for some reason includes copies of title deeds relating to the estate of the 3rd Viscount Massereene in the barony of Cremorne, Co. Monaghan, 1700-1702.)

While these difficulties of lay-out and arrangement exist and have to be taken into consideration, it is still fair to say that anyone who goes carefully through the table of contents of the different sections of the Foster/Massereene archive will not go far wrong. The following is an attempt to indicate the main topics covered and also to give some idea of the volume of material on any one topic. The archive in fact impinges on almost every facet of Irish history from 1750 to 1810, but these notes only relate to the topics which it can fairly be said to cover in some detail.



## **The Massereene Papers**

These comprise a comparatively small proportion of the Foster/Massereene papers - perhaps 2,300 items out of a total of 26,000. They can be broken down in to the following sections:

### ***Estate papers***

There are perhaps 800 title deeds, leases etc. relating to the Massereene estates in Antrim, Cavan, Dublin, Kerry, Louth, Monaghan, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire, and dating from 1590 to 1935.



### ***Family correspondence, 1690-1760***

This is limited in extent, amounting only to c.150 items. It relates mainly to marriage settlements and family finances, but there is some useful political comment about the period 1690-1720.



### ***Family correspondence, 1760-1830***

The rest of the Massereene papers consists of family correspondence falling within this period. A small section of these papers are those of Anne, wife of the 1st Earl of Massereene. They run from 1755 to 1800 and relate to her own property of Row Tor, Derbyshire; Massereene estates and finances; political events in the borough of Antrim; and the erratic career of her eldest son, the 2nd Earl. Only a few of the 2nd Earl's papers have survived, largely because he was mentally deranged and spent much of his career in gaol in Paris. The surviving Massereene family correspondence is largely the correspondence of Chichester Skeffington, afterwards 4th Earl of Massereene, and his wife Lady Harriet, nee Jocelyn. The correspondence runs from the late 1770s to 1816 (in the case of Chichester Skeffington) and to 1831 (in the case of Lady Harriet). Chichester Skeffington's correspondence covers much the same ground as that of his mother, Anne, Countess of Massereene, except that in his case there is some comment on contemporary political events, much comment on his own ambitions for jobs in the revenue, and some excellent material on the estates and finances of the 2nd Marquess of Donegall about the turn of the century. Much of Lady Harriet Skeffington's correspondence consists of letters from her husband on all of the above topics.

There are also good runs of letters to her from friends and members of her own family which give a good picture of social life in Dublin and at various English spas during the last 20 years of the 18th century. Her correspondence during the first 30 years of the 19th century assumes a pious, indeed evangelical, tone.



***General***

The Massereene papers tend to be overshadowed both in content and in bulk by the Foster papers. But they deserve recognition in their own right as a very fine, though unevenly spread, collection of family correspondence running from the 1690s to 1830.



## **The Foster Papers**

### ***Papers on estate and private finances***

The papers (as distinct from the correspondence) on these two topics are generally speaking grouped together in the collection, so it is convenient to deal with them as one unit. They comprise about 2,300 items, of which nearly half are tradesmen's accounts to John Foster from the 1770s to 1810. The estate papers mostly consist of title-deeds, leases, and legal papers relating to disputes over property. There are few rentals, no lease-books, and in fact very little about estate administration. This is probably because there was at one time an estate office at Collon, the contents of which have for the moment and perhaps for ever disappeared.

### ***Correspondence about estates and private finances***

This material is so scattered and inter-woven through the collection that it is very hard to assess numerically. Basically, the table of contents to each section of the papers is the only means of isolating it effectively. It must however be in excess of 2,000 items.

### ***Family correspondence***

The Foster family correspondence, including letters from members of the family about family estates and finances, comes to about 1,750 items. The letters are addressed to Chief Baron Anthony Foster, John (Speaker) Foster and Thomas Henry Foster, Viscount Ferrard, and run from 1730 to 1830. There is a fine run of letters to Anthony Foster from his father, John Foster the elder, dealing with the acquisition of land, politics in Dunleer, etc., in the period 1733-44. There are also long runs of correspondence, mainly with John Foster and numbering perhaps 400 items, about the financial difficulties of two branches of the Foster family - the Sibthorpes of Dunany, Co. Louth, and the Burghs of Bert and Oldtown, Co. Kildare - for the period 1760-80. The rest of the family correspondence is much more miscellaneous in content and relates to the period 1805-30. One of the principal correspondents is John Foster's only daughter, Anna Lady Dufferin, whose letters deal mainly with horticulture and social events. At many points this family correspondence impinges on John Foster's political career. For this reason it is convenient to exclude from the heading of family correspondence his correspondence with his nephews, John Barry, John Leslie Foster and J.S. Rochfort.

### ***Papers of Archbishop Theophilus Bolton of Cashel***

Bolton was a connection by marriage of the Fosters. The Foster papers contain a small but interesting section of his papers dating from the late 1720s to the mid-1740s when he died. There are some letters to him about his library which he bequeathed to the diocese of Cashel, and some 50 draft pamphlets in his handwriting on the wool trade, proposals for a re-coinage, and other economic topics.

Legal case papers and correspondence of Anthony and John Foster in their professional careers

Over 600 items relating to Anthony Foster's career as barrister and judge, 1730-77, and John Foster's career as a barrister, 1766-77. These include lecture notes, briefs, notes on cases, etc. There are perhaps 100 papers, many of them printed, relating to disputed elections during the 1740s, 50s and 60s.



### ***Papers relating to the city of Dublin***

This section of the papers consists of some 400 letters and papers relating to the repair and rebuilding of various Dublin churches, especially St. Werburg's; the work of John and especially Anthony Foster in connection with various Dublin hospitals and other charitable organisations; and the activities of the Dublin Wide Streets Board, Paving Board and Ballast Office. The papers cover the period from 1715 to 1827, with particular emphasis on the years from the 1760's onwards.



### ***Papers on the Dublin Society, the Farming Society of Ireland and other societies and schemes for agricultural improvement***

There are nearly 600 letters and papers of John Foster on these topics, mostly dating from 1805 to 1827. Foster was a leading light in the Dublin Society and the President of the Farming Society. His correspondence is full of information on matters of administration and policy, particularly about the carrying out of county agricultural surveys and about the running of the Dublin Society's botanic garden at Glasnevin. His more important correspondents include Sir John Sinclair, Dr. Walter Wade, General Vallancey, Edward Wakefield (whose tour in Ireland was conducted largely under Foster's auspices) and Richard Lovell Edgeworth.



### ***Linen***

All told, there are some 3,300 letters and papers on the Irish linen industry from the 1760s to 1827. Almost all of these are John Foster's papers, though about 100 reflect his father Anthony Foster's interest in the linen industry. All his life John Foster was a leading figure in the Linen Board - indeed, he was often referred to as the chief trustee, though such an office did not exist. His influence on the Linen Board continued undiminished after his retirement from public life in 1811.

The topics covered are various. The papers covering the period from the early 1760s to the early 1780s deal mainly with the system of sealing. Thereafter they take in bleaching processes; machinery for various aspects of the linen industry; the administration of the Dublin linen hall and returns of linen entering and leaving it; and (during the period of the Napoleonic wars) the cultivation of hemp in Ireland and the procuring of a supply of flaxseed for the United Kingdom as a whole.

However, the most important section of the linen papers is John Foster's correspondence with a series of officers of the Linen Board. There are some 50 letters and memoranda from Robert Stephenson covering the period 1780-90, another 50 from the 10th Earl of Dundonald (who was briefly employed by the Board) for the period 1803-05, and a host of letters from men like Duffin, Blacker, Bernard, Loughlin and many of the Board's provincial inspectors.

Above all, there are 500 to 600 letters between Foster and James Corry Junior, the Secretary to the Board, dating from 1802-1827. The coverage is uneven because whole years are missing from the correspondence, but where it is at its fullest it provides a day-to-day history of the administration of the Linen Board as well as interesting comment on a variety of contemporary events.



### ***Religion***

There are about 350 letters and papers on this subject. Some 150 are probably the papers of Archbishop Bolton and relate to the union of Church of Ireland parishes in 1721. The rest are the papers of John Foster, dating from 1765 to 1811. They relate to the Catholic Question, Maynooth, Regium Donum, the Seceders, and Church of Ireland affairs (with special reference to Primate Boulter's fund and the activities of the Board of First Fruits).

His correspondents on the subject of the Board of First Fruits include primates, archbishops and bishops, and Dr Beaufort, vicar of Collon.



## **Papers of John Foster as Speaker of the Irish House of Commons**

Foster was Speaker from 1785 to 1800 and his papers in this capacity number over 200 items. They consist of notes and precedents, plans for structural alterations to the House, and tenders for the reprinting and indexing of the Irish *Commons Journals* from 1795 onwards.

As was perhaps inevitable in a highly derivative, colonial assembly, the Irish House of Commons of the later 18th century was at pains to out-do its English prototype in all matters of form and outward show, the superior quality of the printings of its *Journals* and *Statutes* being just one symptom of this general phenomenon. Foster was the ideal man to realise its aspirations in this respect. He had a keen eye for minutiae. (So dreaded was he as a stickler for trifles that when, in 1802, there was a short-lived rumour that he might be elected Speaker of the United Parliament, several of the clerks of the British House threatened to resign rather than be subjected to his microscopic examination). From the very outset of his Speakership he took steps to ensure that the records of the House should be properly kept and accommodated.

A commonplace book, 1786-1798, contains his notes on parliamentary precedents. The book starts in January 1786 and is a chronological account of procedural problems which Foster encountered as Speaker, of his rulings on these cases and of the precedents on which they were based. There are quite a few entries for 1786 but thereafter the number tails away. At the end of the 1786 session there is a *resumé* of his actions to date as Speaker, which well illustrates the meticulous attention to detail which was characteristic of the man.

His greatest achievement in this sphere did not take place until towards the end of his Speakership, in 1795, when a lavish reprint and continuation of the Irish *Commons Journals* was undertaken at his instigation. Most of his papers as Speaker relate to the work which lay behind this edition. However, his correspondence, 1795-1820, with George Grierson, the King's Printer for Ireland and the successful contractor for the *Commons Journals*, which has all been brought together into one section of the papers, is not all related to printing; Foster owed Grierson money, and much of their correspondence is concerned with this private debt and not with printing. There is also a specification for the dozen 'extra-fine', specially bound copies of the *Journals* which were to be present to the Royal Library and to the private libraries of other dignitaries. Foster's own set is the most important book in the library of PRONI.



## **Other bibliographical material**

As Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer at Westminster, 1804-1806 and 1807-1811, Foster was concerned with the Irish printings of the United Kingdom statutes; and Governor (the then equivalent of Lord Lieutenant) of Co. Louth, he was concerned with the prompt distribution of sets of the *Statutes* to all the JPs of the county. He was also, in his private capacity, a keen collector of contemporary or near-contemporary books on politics, agriculture, industry, trade and commerce, as witness his unique collection of pamphlets which, having survived the Antrim Castle fire in 1922, is now preserved in the library of Queen's University, Belfast; and his papers contain a certain amount of information on his dealings with booksellers from the 1770s to the 1790s (which bear the reference number D562/4829-4842).



## **Papers of John Foster on Irish trade and revenue, 1777-1800**

John Foster was Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer from 1784 to 1785, though he had effectively been performing the duties of the office since 1777. After his election as Speaker he continued in practice to have a very great influence on all matters of trade and revenue. Some of the trade and revenue papers antedate 1777, notably a run of some 200 or 300 trade and revenue statistics which starts in 1745. But the overwhelming majority of the 18th century papers on this subject fall within the period 1777-1800.

The trade and revenue papers, including the earlier statistics, number some 2,000 items. There are about 150 letters and papers on the Free Trade crisis, 1778-1780, in particular some excellent correspondence between Foster, Sir Richard Heron (the Chief Secretary) and Sackville Hamilton (one of the Under-Secretaries). The corn trade is perhaps the one best represented in the papers for this period (some 350 item). Most of these relate to a threatened embargo on the export of Irish corn in 1789, which Foster as a Lord Justice averted. However, many other branches of trade and industry are well covered, in particular sugar, tobacco, salt, coal, iron, wool, silk and cotton (especially the last). There are also papers on the Commercial Propositions of 1785, and Ireland's trade with Portugal and the East Indies.

Commercial credit is another topic dealt with at some length. There are papers on the measures taken by the Irish government to support it, on insolvent debtors, and on Foster's Partnerships Regulation Bill of 1781 (a milestone piece of legislation in the history of limited liability). On the public revenue side of things, there are papers on the military and civil establishment of Ireland, comparative statistics for Ireland's revenue and expenditure, plans for taxes, duties, loans and lotteries, and papers on the Irish sinking fund and on the progress (always upward) of the Irish national debt.



## **Papers of John Foster as Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer at Westminster, 1804-06 and 1807-11**

This is by far the largest single section of the Foster papers, numbering all told nearly 6,000 items. It is extremely difficult to do justice to such a large mass of correspondence. Certain topics do however stand out as being worthy of particular mention:

- (1) Correspondence about raising Irish government loans (roughly 500 items), 1805-11, particularly correspondence between John Foster and James Crofton, first clerk to the Treasury, 1809-11.
- (2) Correspondence between the Board of Treasury and the subordinate Boards of Customs and Excise, and between John Foster and the Hon. George Cavendish, secretary to the Treasury, 1808-11, concerning fines and seizures imposed by the Boards of Customs and Excise, orders of the Treasury ignored by them, etc. (over 500 items).
- (3) Correspondence of John Foster with the Chairmen of the Boards of Customs and Excise, the Secretary to the Excise, and others, mostly 1809-10, about reforms, revenue and general policy (with special regard to distillation from grain) within their respective departments (roughly 300 items).
- (4) Correspondence about the purchase by the Irish Treasury of the prisage of wines from the 18th Earl of Ormonde, 1803-11, mainly 1808-10 (roughly 200 items).
- (5) Correspondence of John Foster with officials of the Stamp Office about stamp duties and revenue, 1804-11 (roughly 300 items).
- (6) Correspondence of John Foster with officials of the Irish Post Office and others about postal services, mail-coach roads, etc, 1804-11 (over 300 items).

These topics are not necessarily the most important in the Chancellorship of the Exchequer papers, but they are the ones which are easiest to segregate. The other part of this section which is easy to segregate is John Foster's official correspondence with Prime Ministers, Chief Secretaries, etc. The correspondents in this category are: Spencer Perceval (over 200 items), Nicholas Vansittart (10), Sir Arthur Wellesley (100), Robert Dundas (20) William Wellesley Pole (100), and William Huskisson (30).

There are prominent correspondents of John Foster's whose letters have been included under the heading of Chancellorship of the Exchequer papers but who in fact wrote to him on a wide variety of subjects of general political interest. These include: his brother-in-law, Thomas Burgh (roughly 30 items); his nephews, John

Leslie Foster, John Staunton Rochfort and John Maxwell Barry (together 450 items); Lord Sheffield (50); and the 1st Marquess of Sligo (30). These runs of correspondence, especially Rochfort's, are an invaluable source of information about Foster's career and many of the great political issues of the day, both in England and Ireland.

The rest of the Chancellorship of the Exchequer papers are not easy to segregate, either by topic or by correspondent. They are arranged in chronological runs and cover a vast range of subjects connected with patronage and policy.



## **Later correspondence of John Foster on matters concerned with politics, trade and finance, 1812-1828**

This section of the papers numbers about 1,300 items. It contains virtually nothing to do with Co. Louth politics and patronage or with the Linen Board. In general, what it consists of is non-Louth patronage correspondence, and correspondence about matters of national importance like the Catholic Question, the Corn Laws and administrative reform in Ireland during the 1820s. The most important single correspondent is Foster's nephew John Leslie Foster (260 letters) and other correspondents of note include Lords Camden and Norbury, and the Hon. Denis Browne.



## **Papers on Co. Louth affairs**

The papers of Anthony, John and Thomas Foster contain well over 3,400 items about politics, patronage, militia, yeomanry, disturbances, etc, in Co. Louth. Of these some 200 are letters, accounts and freeholders' lists relating to Co. Louth elections, 1761-1826. Another sub-section of the Co. Louth papers consists of over 300 letters and papers of John Foster relating to the state of the country, 1804-28, including his correspondence on the subject with Lords Lieutenant and Chief Secretaries (especially Peel). There are a further 300 letters and papers, mostly Thomas Foster's, on the subject of the Louth militia and government policy with regard to militia in general, 1804-22. Thomas Foster's papers also contain some 220 letters about Drogheda elections and politics, 1807-1822. The rest of the Co. Louth papers relate to Grand Jury matters, especially road presentments, magistrates' meetings, addresses to the King, and, above all, patronage correspondence with John Foster's Louth constituents. In general, this section of the papers gives an exceptionally good impression of the operations of local government in the first 30 years of the 19th century.



## **Miscellaneous correspondence of Thomas Henry Foster, 2nd Viscount Ferrard**

The correspondence in the Foster papers dies out about 1830. But there is a small section of correspondence (roughly 200 items) of Thomas Foster relating to the County Antrim estates which he administered in right of his wife, and making some reference to Co. Antrim and national politics, 1816-35.



## General

The Foster papers are almost exclusively John Foster's papers. They do not come into their own until after he had attained his majority, and they peter out soon after his death in 1828. The interesting thing about John Foster is that he never seems to have thrown anything out. He even bundled and filed in the early 19th century packets of tradesmen's accounts which were 30 years out of date! Because Foster did no subsequent weeding of his papers, they give a very good impression of the tedious minutiae of local patronage which any great man had to trouble himself with. Nevertheless, the accidents of survival have taken a heavy toll of his papers and there are many blanks on topics where a searcher could reasonably expect to find a great deal of information.

There is nothing on Foster's Corn Law of 1784. There is nothing on Catholic relief in the period 1791-3. There are less than 50 papers, and no correspondence, on the Union. Indeed, in the period up to 1804 there is virtually no political correspondence of any kind. What correspondence there is confined to trade, revenue, family finances and (to some slight extent) local politics. There is virtually nothing on Poyning's Law, the Volunteers, the Act of Renunciation, the Regency crisis, the Fitzwilliam episode, the 1798 Rebellion – in short, on almost all the major political events of the period. For the years 1797-1804 the papers are very thin on all topics.

By 1805 they are in full stride, though the greatest concentration is in the period 1807-1811. Most of the papers from 1805 onwards are correspondence, and one of their great merits is that Foster was meticulous in preserving copies of his out-going letters. This means that both halves of the correspondence are preserved in the one collection. Obviously, there are many gaps, which the peculiarities of Foster's own filing-system make it easy to spot. For one year it may be that copies of his out-going letters to people whose names begin with the letters 'N' to 'R' have survived, while the in-coming letters from the same people have perished.

These gaps and imperfections are much to be regretted, but they still leave behind a vast amount of material of the highest quality. It is however necessary to draw attention to the gaps and imperfections, because with a collection of the size and complexity of the Foster papers it is as useful for a searcher to have some idea in advance of what is *not* there as of what is.

